Post-Revolution Haiti and the Question of Legitimate Governance: American and British Representations of the Early Haitian State, 1804-1824

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years a wealth of scholarship has highlighted the wide-ranging effects of the Haitian Revolution throughout the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century. In particular, studies have asserted the impact that the Revolution had on abolitionist debates and perceptions of race, particularly in America and Britain. This thesis builds on this scholarship by exploring how the early Haitian state and its first leaders were represented in American and British discourses following Haiti’s Declaration of Independence in 1804. While studies have already highlighted how Haiti’s attempts to establish its political sovereignty were severely hampered by American and British reactions to the prospect of black political leadership, this study suggests that race was only one factor in these transatlantic receptions. Indeed, Haitian leaders in the first twenty years of its independence became key reference points in American and British discussions of the foundations of political legitimacy. This thesis explores how Haiti and its early leaders were represented in American and British newspapers, periodicals, literary texts and images. It proposes that reactions to the emergence of the Haitian state were as driven by the domestic political discourses and tensions of America and Britain in the early nineteenth century as they were by ideas of race. Ultimately this study argues that by exploring the different discourses to which Haiti contributed leads to a more nuanced understanding of the reasons behind Haiti’s struggle to gain official diplomatic recognition from America and Britain in its formative years, and also a better understanding of how American and British commentators were formulating arguments regarding effective, progressive and legitimate governance in the early nineteenth century.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

James Forde
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Introduction

In the early nineteenth century, reports of the Haitian Revolution shook the Atlantic world to its core. Between 1791 and 1804, the colonial powers of France, Spain and England all tried and failed to subjugate the revolutionary black ex-slaves and freemen.\(^1\) The loss of France’s most prized colony in the Caribbean—the so-called ‘pearl of the Antilles’—and the victory of the revolutionary slaves over the imperial might of Europe amounted to an “unthinkable” event for the powers of the West.\(^2\) On 1 January 1804, the first leader of independent Haiti, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, addressed the citizens of Saint-Domingue and confirmed the new nation’s separation from colonial France. In the process, Dessalines proclaimed the abolition of slavery forever from the island and renamed the country, “Haiti”\(^3\).

In the four decades that followed Haiti’s Declaration of Independence, a number of leaders—all of whom had fought in the Revolution—would adopt a variety of forms of government in their attempts to cement a foothold for the fledgling Haitian state in the political world of the Atlantic. Following Dessalines’s death in 1806 Haiti was divided by internal conflict. As a result, Henry Christophe assumed control of the north and Alexandre Pétion of the south. Jean-Pierre Boyer succeeded Pétion after his death in 1818 and, following the death of

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\(^3\) In fact Dessalines named the new nation “Hayti”—a spelling that would remain until well into the late nineteenth century. It is worth noting that American and British writers used the names “Hayti”, “Saint-Domingue” and “St. Domingo” as virtual synonyms for the Haitian state in the early to mid-nineteenth century.
Christophe in 1820, Boyer once more unified the north and south of the country, where he remained as leader until 1843. Despite their vastly different approaches to political leadership and their distinct visions for the future of the nation, all of Haiti’s early leaders faced the same dilemma: how could the Western hemisphere’s first independent black state thrive—or even survive—on the Atlantic stage? In particular, the fact that Britain, France and the rest of Europe’s global powers refused to officially recognise Haiti’s sovereignty as an independent nation until the mid-1820s—and American recognition would not come until 1862—was a damaging blow to the prosperity of the Haitian state and one from which it never fully recovered. For Haiti’s early leaders, the successful revolution against Europe’s colonial powers was only the beginning of a long battle for independence and recognition. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has observed, Haiti was essentially the “first testing ground of neo-colonialism” and it therefore experienced the “somber implications of that policy for the third world very early”.

This thesis explores how observers in both America and Britain reflected upon the early years of Haitian independence and represented Haiti’s early leaders in a variety of political discourses. In particular, this study highlights how the modes of government and the multiple titles adopted by Haiti’s early leaders were often used as central points of reference in American and British narratives which debated the concept of political legitimacy. These debates were often an inward reflection of the legitimacy and superiority—or otherwise—of Britain’s and America’s own forms of government. The representations of Haiti in the first two decades of its independence explored in this study suggest that a number of observers supported the policy of non-recognition and were apparently eager to see the black state fail—thereby supporting Trouillot’s suggestion that Haitian independence was just as much of an ‘unthinkable’ event as the revolution that preceded it for the Western world in the nineteenth century. This thesis also argues, however, that at times Haiti’s leaders elicited support from a variety of

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figures and sources on both sides of the Atlantic, despite the official non-recognition policies of their governments—support that was often used to strengthen a variety of ideologies regarding political legitimacy and what constituted fair, effective governance. In both critiques and celebrations of Haiti’s independence, therefore, the early Haitian state became a central entity in transatlantic debates on how political leadership should operate in the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century.

A number of crucial studies have analysed the political leadership of the early Haitian state and this work has mapped the attempts of Haiti’s first leaders to secure its economic future, to solidify its independence and to elicit official recognition from the powers of the West. These studies have served to underline the limits that were imposed upon Haiti by countries such as America and Britain in its crucial, formative years but they have also highlighted the choices that Haiti’s early leaders made—choices that were “crucial for subsequent history”. Recent scholarship has also analysed the various proclamations and constitutions of Haiti’s politicians in these early years. This work highlights the various strategies these leaders adopted in their attempts to assert Haiti’s independence to the wider political world and to publicly call on Western leaders to recognise its sovereignty—calls that would go unheeded for the first two decades of its existence.

The enormous impact of the Haitian Revolution on the wider Western world has also been the focus of a wealth of scholarship in the last two decades. In general this scholarship has underlined the significance of the Revolution on political

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6 Trouillot, *State against Nation*, 59.

discourses in Britain and America which debated the abolition of slavery—an impact that continued in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution as newspapers, pamphlets and literary texts continued to ‘remember’ the shocking violence perpetrated by both sides as well as the destructive nature of the Revolution for the colonists and the colony as a whole.\(^8\) The political messages underpinning these narratives were largely “bifurcated” as pro- and anti-slavery supporters on both sides of the Atlantic looked back on the events in Saint-Domingue as vital instruments for their respective campaigns.\(^9\) Anti-slavery supporters such as James Stephen and Thomas Clarkson saw the success of the black revolutionaries as ‘proof’ that slaves in the colonies not only desired emancipation but also had the necessary capabilities to achieve it on their own terms.\(^10\) At such a crucial time in anti-slavery debates in Britain and America, abolitionists asserted the idea that if their respective governments did not act swiftly, a ‘second Saint Domingue’ would inevitably occur in the British colonies or in the southern slave states of America.\(^11\) Pro-slavery supporters mirrored

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this strategy of the abolitionists by playing on a similar fear and asserting that
this revolutionary spirit could spread beyond the newly formed Haitian state—
something Ashli White has termed the “contagion of rebellion”.\textsuperscript{12} Pro-slavery
memories of the Revolution also focused on the apparent meddling of French
abolitionists who were claimed to have stirred up ideas of revolution among the
hitherto ‘contented’ black populations of Saint-Domingue as a way to indict the
increasingly vocal and influential abolitionist movements. In this way, the
Haitian Revolution had a pivotal role to play for both supporters and opponents
of slavery in the nineteenth century.

Such studies on the impact of the Revolution and Haitian independence often
argue that Atlantic receptions to the Revolution were largely race-based
reactions to a revolution of slaves and the presence of the Western hemisphere’s
first independent black state. David Nicholls, for example, has argued that Haiti
became a “symbol of anti-colonialism and racial equality” and as a result
European powers were “apprehensive about the existence of a free black state”
in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, Trouillot’s argument regarding
the ‘unthinkability’ of the Revolution is based on the contention that European
and American observers at the time believed that “enslaved Africans and their
descendants could not envision their freedom”.\textsuperscript{14} Trouillot suggests that this
‘unthinkability’ also extended to the very notion of an independent black state—
something that he has demonstrated persisted until the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{15} A
central part of Trouillot’s argument is that European and American observers of
the Revolution and Haitian independence viewed these events through a prism
of “ready-made categories”—categories that were largely formed by eighteenth-
and nineteenth-century ideas of race.\textsuperscript{16} More recently, Marlene Daut’s work has

\textsuperscript{12} White, \textit{Encountering Revolution}, 125.
\textsuperscript{13} Nicholls, \textit{Dessalines to Duvalier}, 4.
\textsuperscript{14} Trouillot, \textit{Silencing the Past}, 73.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 73.
expanded upon Trouillot’s argument by exploring in much more detail these categories and by underpinning the significance of perceptions of race in Atlantic reactions to Haitian independence. Daut’s exhaustive study of literary representations of the Revolution and Haiti in Western discourses until the mid-nineteenth century demonstrates that the events surrounding Haitian independence were “incessantly narrated in a particularly ‘racialized’ way”.  

While the role of race was undoubtedly pivotal in Atlantic reactions to Haitian independence in the nineteenth century, receptions to the emerging Haitian state and its leaders were also shaped and formed by a number of other social and political concerns. If, as Daut argues, “‘racial’ thinking” was central to how Western observers understood Haiti, then what other modes of thought influenced nineteenth-century reactions to the Haitian state? In particular, if nineteenth-century perceptions of race were so central to depictions of Haiti’s revolutionary figures, which other ideas also influenced American and British thought towards Haiti’s early leaders? The representations of Haiti explored in this thesis sometimes reflect an anxiety towards the presence of an independent black state. However, what is often overlooked is that American and British depictions of Haiti were at times reflective of other, alternative domestic political anxieties—tensions that often had little to do with Haiti itself. While Daut’s work is concerned with ontologies of race, this thesis is an analysis of how pre-existing perceptions of political legitimacy and leadership were at times strengthened—and at other times called into question—by the actions of Haiti’s early leaders. This thesis demonstrates that the impact of Haiti’s independence was not only felt in transatlantic debates of slavery, colonialism and race. This is, of course, not to contest the arguments put forward by Daut and Trouillot regarding the central role of race in Western reactions to the Revolution and Haitian independence. Rather, this thesis contributes to this body of work by further highlighting the wide variety of ways in which Haiti’s independence provoked responses in both America and Britain in the early nineteenth century.

18 Ibid., 26.
Indeed, a number of crucial studies have begun to demonstrate the broader significance of Haiti’s fight for independence and these works have highlighted the impact of the Revolution for the Atlantic in a wide variety of social, political and economic ways. More specifically, scholars have shown the enduring legacy of the Revolution and Haitian independence for African-Americans throughout the nineteenth century. Other work has underlined the impact that representations of Haiti had on American and British diplomatic relationships with the fledgling Haitian state. Such studies are reflective of the multiple prisms through which some observers were willing to view Haiti in the early years of its independence—prisms that were ultimately self-serving in their motivations. This work has started to expose the extent to which the emergence of an independent Haiti impacted upon European and American political discourses—discourses that were not always confined to discussions of race, slavery or colonialism. As such, these studies have started to uncover more fully the significance of not only the Haitian Revolution but also Haitian independence as a seismic moment in Atlantic history—a significance that was recognised and reflected upon by a wide array of political commentators at the time.


Studies on the central role of Haiti in Atlantic world politics in the nineteenth century have increasingly looked towards 1804 as a starting point rather than an end point in their attempts to underline the impact of Haiti's independence. Despite these crucial studies, we are only beginning to fully understand the extent to which Haitian independence impacted political discourses and ideas in the nineteenth century. Laurent Dubois has called for the need to “question, deconstruct, and rewrite narratives of Haiti’s history in ways that simultaneously illuminate the past and the future”, particularly by focusing on the development of the Haitian state throughout the nineteenth century. Dubois has further argued that greater scholarly attention towards Haiti in the nineteenth century would be a “vital step in the broader struggle to debunk teleological certainties and recast the suffocating stories about Haiti’s past that too often imprison the present". In this way, this thesis aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of Haiti for the wider Atlantic world in the nineteenth century.

In so doing, this thesis suggests that the broader context of Atlantic world politics is sometimes overlooked in analyses of depictions of the early Haitian state—and in particular of Haiti’s early leaders. This study therefore focuses on receptions to the governments of three of Haiti’s first heads of state: Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henry Christophe and Jean-Pierre Boyer. From 1804 to 1843, these three leaders—all stalwarts of Haiti’s revolution against France—introduced different modes of government in their attempts to secure economic prosperity for the new state and diplomatic recognition on the world stage. As such, Atlantic observers witnessed Haitian heads of state variously adopt the titles of president, emperor and king at different junctures as each leader projected his own vision of Haiti’s future. This thesis examines reactions to these early leaders in the first twenty years of Haiti’s independence: from Dessalines’s establishment of the first Haitian government in 1804 and his creation of the Empire of Haiti in 1805; to the 1807 succession of Christophe and his establishment of the first Haitian monarchy in 1811; through to the death of the

22 Laurent Dubois, "Thinking Haiti’s Nineteenth Century," Small Axe, 18, no. 2 (2014), 72.
23 Ibid., 79.
Haitian king and the emergence of President Boyer and the Haitian Republic in the early 1820s.

Boyer would rule as president until 1843 but this study focuses on the period from 1804 to 1824—the years in which the powers of Europe and America were united in their refusal to officially recognise the sovereignty of the Haitian state. A major point of focus for this study, therefore, is to highlight the different voices that at times aligned with, and at other times spoke against, America’s and Britain’s official non-recognition of Haiti’s early governments. By particularly focusing on these transitions of political power in Haiti, this thesis argues that the introduction of these different forms of government stimulated intense discussions in American and British discourses—discussions which, whether consciously or not, often served to either support or deny Haitian calls for recognition. This thesis also suggests that the turbulent nature of the political world of the Atlantic in this period of time had a significant impact on the way in which Haiti and its leaders were perceived. In particular, Haiti’s first governments emerged at a time when challenges to traditional forms of political rule swept through Europe and the Americas from the early 1800s until the mid-1820s. And the threat or promise that these challenges posed to American and British interests coincided with Haiti’s attempts to establish the legitimacy of its own government in the eyes of the polities of the Atlantic world. This thesis contends that the different modes of governance adopted by Haiti’s early leaders were at times derided and at other times celebrated by a variety of political commentators, and that these perceptions were often reflective of a broader reaction to changes in governance and political leadership throughout the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century.

While recent studies have begun to consider the complexities of Haiti’s early leaders more carefully, Toussaint Louverture—the famed and fated leader of the Revolution—continues to dominate scholarly discussions. This is undoubtedly because Toussaint featured much more prominently in contemporary discourses on both sides of the Atlantic—something that this thesis does not, of course, intend to dispute. An unintentional consequence of this focus on Toussaint,
however, is that the attention that Haiti’s early leaders also received from Atlantic observers has yet to be fully appreciated. This thesis therefore deliberately focuses on three of Haiti’s early leaders in order to argue that these leaders prompted much more nuanced and, at times, provocative transatlantic reactions than is often realised. American and British depictions often situated the adoption of these different modes of leadership within narratives that sought to attack or celebrate the virtues of such a mode of governance—narratives that in turn looked to strengthen their own notion of political identity. As such, receptions to Haiti’s early leaders must be viewed within a broader context of American and British politics in the early nineteenth century.

One of the fundamental issues of political debate in America and Britain during the early nineteenth century related to political legitimacy and, in particular, the perceived virtues of different forms of government and political ideologies. As Immanuel Wallerstein has demonstrated, when discussing the very concept of legitimacy, at the centre of this discourse lies the issue of sovereignty.24 Mlada Bukovansky has traced the “transformation of the terms of political legitimacy” to the American and French revolutions, arguing that perceptions of legitimacy “lay at the heart” of these revolutions.25 In the aftermath of the revolutions in America and France—and in the face of revolutionary action throughout Europe and Latin America in the 1810s and 1820s—American and British political observers in the early 1800s constantly evaluated and re-evaluated the foundations of political sovereignty and the terms of legitimate governance. In particular, Wallerstein has argued that the French Revolution “reoriented the concept of sovereignty, from the monarch or the legislature to the people” and that, as a result, “the politics of inclusion and exclusion became a center-piece of national politics”.26 At a time when American and British commentators were still coming to terms with the consequences of this ‘reorientation’, the Haitian

state was at times included —and at other times excluded—from assertions of the legitimacy and sovereignty of post-revolutionary states more generally.

Perhaps most pertinently for discussions of the Haitian state in the early nineteenth century, as Wallerstein elaborates, “in the modern-world system, the legitimacy of sovereignty requires reciprocal recognition”. A number of studies have underlined the motivations behind—and damaging consequences of—the lack of official recognition of the sovereignty of the early Haitian state from around the world. Britain would not officially recognise Haiti’s sovereignty until after Boyer agreed in 1825 to pay crippling reparations to France for the ‘losses’ of the French colonists. Britain’s refusal to officially recognise the Haitian state largely stemmed from a fear that to do so would effectively legitimise the notion of slave revolution—a potentially dangerous statement for Britain’s Caribbean colonies, which would not abolish slavery until 1838. Haitian hopes for British recognition were also severely dented by a secret agreement between Britain and France at the 1815 Congress of Vienna. As part of these peacetime negotiations, Britain agreed to stand aside from French dealings with its former colony—including if France decided to attempt to reclaim the island—in return for official French acceptance of Britain’s right to trade with the Haitian state.

Perhaps even more damagingly, America would not officially recognise the Haitian state until 1862. Despite the lucrative opportunities for advancing American trade with Haiti, for successive American governments “the history of how [Haiti] had come to power offered a potentially inflammatory example” to the free and enslaved black populations of the United States. This anxiety also extended to a fear among some Americans of the presence of black diplomats in American corridors of power. Such ideas continued to influence attitudes towards Haiti until the mid-nineteenth century, particularly among the

27 Ibid., 44.
28 Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 41-57; Fanning, Caribbean Crossing; Laurent Dubois, Haiti, 138-154.
29 Dubois, Haiti, 71-76.
30 Ibid., 139.
politicians of America’s southern states. With the secession of the southern states in 1861 Abraham Lincoln was persuaded to finally recognise the sovereignty of the Haitian state, almost sixty years after it had declared its independence.\(^ {31}\) By this time, however, decades of American non-recognition had already inflicted considerable economic damage on the Haitian state.

Although “[p]olitical legitimacy...requires external recognition”, the discussions of the Haitian state explored in this thesis demonstrate a willingness among some American and British thinkers to assert Haiti’s political legitimacy, despite the absence of official recognition from their own governments.\(^ {32}\) As well as outlining some of the different voices in America and Britain that called for or denied recognition of Haiti’s sovereignty, this thesis also highlights how the very issue of the sovereignty of Haiti’s early governments was used in discourses that reflected upon the legitimacy of America and Britain’s own political leaders. If, as Bukovansky argues, political legitimacy is “conceptualized and contested through the medium of political culture”, then this thesis examines the different political cultures that formed depictions of the Haitian state—formations that, in moments of convenience, sought to deny or assert the sovereignty of the Haitian state.\(^ {33}\)

Affirmations of the superiority or inferiority of American and British modes of governance were also often used in both nationalist and anti-nationalist discourses on both sides of the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century. Both loyalists and radical thinkers used nationalist rhetoric as a key component in their discussions of political legitimacy. And, as the work of Linda Colley and Sam Haynes has shown, such assertions of patriotism and considerations of national identity were often reactionary constructions to the governments and political leaders of foreign ‘Others’. For Colley, a key factor in the emergence of British national identity in the eighteenth century was a desire among Britons to be viewed as separate and superior to the French—a belief that continued into the

\(^ {31}\) Ibid., 152-154.
\(^ {33}\) Ibid., 1.
nineteenth century. Similarly, Sam Haynes has noted how America's own national identity became more prominent and defined in the early nineteenth century, largely as part of a desire to be separated culturally and ideologically from America's ex-colonial power. A number of scholars have further emphasised that the end of the War of 1812 was a defining moment in early American history as it marked a final and more definitive break away from the political and cultural influence of Britain. Benedict Anderson's observations that nations are, in essence, “imagined communities” have been well noted and are further supported by Wallerstein's argument that nations are “myths in the sense that they are all social creations”. With this in mind, the way in which Haiti was depicted in the early nineteenth century in America and Britain gives an insight not only into how some observers imagined the early Haitian state but also how they imagined their own nation and system of governance. As Laura Benton has highlighted, “sovereignty is more myth than reality, more a story that polities tell about their own power than a definite quality they possess”. Importantly, the ways in which Haiti was represented say as much about how a number of actors perceived their own country and government as they do about how they perceived Haiti itself. These reactions to Haitian independence provide an insight to and a greater understanding of how both American and British observers constructed depictions of political ‘Others’ in their affirmations and questioning of their own national identity in the early nineteenth century.

35 Sam W. Haynes, Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).
38 Lauren Benton, A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 279.
In order to highlight effectively the motivations behind these depictions of the early Haitian state, the American and British historical contexts in which these representations and commentaries emerged are key to this thesis. At the same time that the newly independent Haitian state was seeking to establish its sovereignty in the eyes of Western politicians, the early American republic was looking to further assert the legitimacy of its own government both to the powers of the Atlantic and to its own citizens. In particular, as a number of studies have shown, since America’s own revolution the notion of popular sovereignty or the ‘consent of the governed’ remained an essential component of American discourses concerned with political legitimacy—something that persisted well into the nineteenth century. Andrew Shankman has claimed that since the American Revolution, Americans had “claimed a right to judge the actions of government, and to violently overthrow it if it pervasively acted without the consent of the governed in ways that threatened life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. 39 Edmund Morgan has further argued that the perceived sovereignty of the American people was largely a “fiction” that persisted into the nineteenth century—a political construct that enables “the few to govern the many”. 40 Sandra Moats’ work has advanced Morgan’s argument by examining how America’s early leaders looked to promote the notion of popular sovereignty to the people through symbols and rituals—especially in contradistinction to the “monarchical pomp and ceremony” that largely defined European governments in the early nineteenth century. 41 Historians have also underlined the role that Thomas Jefferson’s political rhetoric played in asserting the significance of the consent of the people in truly legitimate forms of government—an assertion that continued as presidents such as James Monroe similarly and publicly tried to further distance the American republic from the

pretensions and symbols of monarchical rule. In this way, the notion that popular sovereignty constituted a more legitimate form of sovereignty than dynastic monarchy was a key component of American political thought in the early nineteenth century.

In the early 1800s debates abounded as to the precise policies and ideologies that should be promoted in order to secure economic and social prosperity for the early American republic. Jefferson’s second electoral victory in 1804 served to solidify the ideology of the Democratic-Republicans as the president looked to once and for all cement a republican identity in America—one that turned its back on the traditional political structures and hierarchies of Britain and the Old World dynasties. The idea that the people were central to the American political system was promoted by Democratic-Republicans, and Jefferson in particular saw it as central to the political identity of the early American republic. This was contested, particularly by Federalist Americans who associated democracy with the dangers of Jacobinism and who warned that affording too much agency to ‘the people’ would see America descend into the political chaos and violence of revolutionary France. Federalists and Anglophiles wailed at the perceived destruction of traditional political hierarchies and lamented the increasing power of the people in democratic policies. However, despite this opposition, the power and influence of the Federalist party eroded significantly in the 1810s. Jeffersonian ideology that emphasised the role of the people in governmental affairs largely dominated American politics in the early 1800s—something that was seen to be a vital distinction between the legitimacy of the American republic and the nation.

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42 Wood, Empire of Liberty, 199; Moats, Celebrating the Republic, 84-108.
43 Wood, Empire of Liberty, 301.
45 For an analysis of these kinds of narratives see Rachel Hope Cleves, The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
states of Old World Europe, and which was perceived to confirm America’s status as the “strongest government on earth”.47

After Jefferson’s final term came to an end in 1809, the subsequent presidencies of James Madison and James Monroe both sought to find ways to secure America’s economic future and to further strengthen the ideologies of the Democratic-Republican party.48 By doing so, these successive administrations sought to further solidify the legitimacy of America’s republicanism to its own citizens. Despite the electoral successes of the party, the lack of partisan resistance in American politics in the late 1810s meant that by 1820 some Americans had started to question the increasing power of their federal government and projected fears and anxieties of the formation of an unopposed tyrannical government on American soil—one that seemingly only answered to itself.49 Domestic crises in this time, including the economic distresses of the late 1810s, only served to fuel American thought that the government had started to fail the people it should serve.50 In this climate, Americans once again debated the legitimacy of its republican government and the policies it should adopt both in order to succeed and to effectively serve its citizens.

One of the key concerns for America’s political leaders in the early nineteenth century was the best method for the republic to further legitimise its place in an Atlantic world still largely dominated by the regimes and politics of Old World

Europe. In the early 1800s, both Democrats and Federalists largely agreed on the necessity of America carving its own unique place in Atlantic world politics and they in general “welcomed the collapse of the Old World colonial order” as a “validation” of their own revolution and the formation of a republican government. But unlike Anglophile Federalists, Democratic-Republicans viewed America’s ex-colonial power as an enemy and one that not only threatened the commercial interests of the early republic but also the very notion of republicanism around the globe. The attachment to Britain that remained in Federalist minds largely faded when America would once more go to war with its former colonizer in 1812. America’s perceived victory over Britain in 1815 has been described as a watershed moment in American history—one that began to finally solidify American confidence in its place in Atlantic world politics. Although anxieties towards the government would emerge more prominently with the economic difficulties of the late 1810s, Americans largely remained united in their derision for the Old World forms of governance that continued to dominate Atlantic politics in the early 1820s. By the beginning of the 1820s, American politicians believed with more conviction that conflicts between countries—and particularly those of the Old World and the New World—were largely ideological and based on which system of government would best succeed on the Atlantic stage. Politicians and citizens alike therefore collectively asserted that the American republic was the leading light in discussions of legitimate political sovereignty in the early nineteenth

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52 Ibid., 38.
56 Lewis, Problem of Neighbourhood, 160.
century—a light that cast a long shadow on Old World, dynastic claims to legitimacy.

In this way, the early nineteenth century was a period of fervent political action and debate in America and the perceived successes or shortcomings of Haiti’s early administrations were scrutinised and manipulated to suit a range of political narratives—discourses that in turn sought to assert what constituted legitimate governance for a New World republic. Within these narratives observers often turned to Haiti and its leaders as ‘evidence’ of the virtues or pitfalls of the various modes of governance that the early Haitian state adopted. In this way, the legitimacy of Haiti’s various governments often served to underline or call into question the legitimacy of America’s own infant republic.

Debates surrounding the foundations of legitimate forms of political rule were equally crucial to British discourses in the early nineteenth century. In the early 1800s, British political attention was partly concerned with the uncertain future of Britain’s Caribbean colonies in light of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, with observers debating the best way for British colonial interests to be managed in order for them to thrive. The lawless and chaotic nature of Britain’s colonies was ‘brought home’ to British audiences as stories of British governors’ increasing despotism emerged in the press in the early 1800s. Historians such as Christopher Bayly and James Epstein have underlined the repressive and aristocratic modes of governing that took shape in the British colonies—most notably in the Caribbean. Epstein has labelled this an “aristocratic reaction” to the “crisis in ruling-class legitimacy” brought about by the revolutionary

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upheaval in Europe in the early 1800s. As this work has shown, governors in the British colonies in this time were ruling with increasingly oppressive forms of governance, even against British subjects—forms of rule that were viewed as an affront to British notions of law and just governance. As such, the formation of acceptable and legitimate forms of governance in the colonies—and the parameters within which Britain’s governors should have to operate—became a key topic of discussion in British political narratives in the early nineteenth century.

Although concerns about the governance of Britain’s colonies were prominent, British political anxieties at the beginning of the nineteenth century largely centred on the emergence of Napoleon Bonaparte and his plans for the French republic. Britain’s continuing war with France from 1803 to 1815 increased anti-French sentiment as loyalist narratives underlined the threat—both ideological and tangible—that Napoleonic France posed to Britain. In this wartime period British political voices were largely united in their denunciations of the French leader. Central to these derisions was the perceived ‘illegitimacy’ of Napoleon’s status as head of the French republic. The illegitimacy of Napoleon was further highlighted by his self-nominated emperorship—a title that British loyalists mocked and derided. Stuart Semmel has argued that it was in response to Napoleon that the very notion of ‘legitimacy’ emerged as a central frame of reference and debate in British political discourses. Within this context the figure of Napoleon remained a focal point in British discourses concerned with political legitimacy and leadership throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

59 Epstein, "Taking Class Notes on Empire," in At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 251.
But the impact of British perceptions of events in France on British debates surrounding governance, legitimacy and national identity of course preceded the rise of Napoleon. As Marilyn Morris has demonstrated, in response to the perceived 'horrors' of the French Revolution the virtues of Britain’s constitutional monarchy were once more pronounced. As a result, in the latter half of his reign, George III soon enjoyed the kind of popularity of which most other British monarchs could have only dreamed. Christopher Bayly has further argued that the withdrawal from public life of George III allowed the British government to “enlarge the importance of royalty as the symbolic centre of a nation at war and to elaborate the idea of an Imperial Crown”. Even British radicals and reformers in general did not necessarily promote anti-monarchical rhetoric in the early 1800s—rather, reformers simply “desired a monarch who was accessible and responsible to his subjects”. In this way, the institution of the British monarchy was an important consideration in British discussions of legitimate sovereignty and affirmations of the superiority of Britain's political system.

As the work of James Vernon and James Epstein has shown, both loyalists and reformers in the nineteenth century generally portrayed Britain's constitutional monarchy not only as a system of legitimate governance but one that was to be revered and protected. Where these sides of the political spectrum differed, however, was in whether the virtues of such a system of government were still present in the early nineteenth century or whether this had already

63 Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 110.
disappeared. By the mid-1810s, British radical voices had become more prominent in the face of increasingly harsh governmental policies which were aimed at suppressing dissident political voices. The Peterloo Massacre of 1819 signified a defining, divisive moment in British politics and was an event which further strengthened a shift towards republican ideals within British radical circles by the late 1810s. With the death of the popular George III—and the coronation of the derided George IV—the merits of Britain’s form of political leadership were hotly, and in some cases vociferously, contested. The popularity of the British monarchy was severely dented by the succession of George IV, whose time as Regent had proved for many observers that he lacked any sense of paternal care for his subjects. His apparent complicity in the events of Peterloo and the subsequent crackdown on non-loyalist voices and publications further strengthened radical thought by the 1820s that the British government and monarchy equated to a single form of tyrannical oppression for the British people—something that, for some prominent radicals at least, pointed to the merits of republicanism over Britain’s once great but now flawed constitutional monarchy.

At a time of such political conflict and uncertainty on both sides of the Atlantic—and with debates surrounding political legitimacy remaining a key concern of American and British thought—this thesis analyses how Haiti’s early governments and leaders were considered in literature, images, newspapers and periodicals in the early nineteenth century. This study contributes to existing scholarship that has highlighted the various ways in which Haiti has been (re)imagined in literary representations to suit a variety of purposes and agendas across the Atlantic from the beginning of the 1791-1804 Revolution until the present day. Cora Kaplan, for instance, has argued that analysing

66 Vernon, Politics and the People, 298.
67 Malcolm Chase, 1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 52; Epstein, Radical Expression, 100-146.
68 Poole, Politics of Regicide, 154.
69 Daut, Tropics of Haiti; Clavin, Toussaint Louverture; Philip Kaisary, The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imagination: Radical Horizons, Conservative Constraints (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014); Gregory Pierrot, ""Our
literary representations of Toussaint Louverture helps us to better understand how he came to represent the “threat, as well as the promise, of the spread of freedom and political autonomy to non-white peoples”. Similarly, the depictions of the early Haitian state explored in this study highlight how the early leaders of Haiti came to represent both a promise as well as a threat to American and British political ideologies about legitimacy and sovereignty at distinct moments of domestic political anxiety or confidence throughout the early 1800s.

This study explores a range of literary material to better understand the various lenses through which Haiti was imagined in the early nineteenth century. As Benedict Anderson has argued, the emergence of a global print culture was central to the formation of nationalist ideas and ‘imagined communities’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With this in mind, the depictions of Haiti explored in this study afford a greater understanding both of how American and British writers viewed the early Haitian nation and how they reflected upon their own national identities. The work of Jeffrey Pasley has perhaps best outlined the central role that newspapers played in American politics from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. In particular, Pasley highlights the words of Reverend Samuel Miller—a prominent political writer in America who wrote in 1803 that newspapers had become “the vehicles of discussion in which the principles of government, the interests of nations...are all arraigned, tried, and decided”. As such, Miller concluded, newspapers were “immense moral and political engines closely connected with the welfare of the state, and deeply involving both its peace and prosperity”. Kevin Gilmartin has similarly highlighted how literature, newspapers and pamphlets were central in the circulation of both

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71 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 49.
radical and counterrevolutionary ideas in Britain by the end of the eighteenth century.73 Gilmartin has underlined the regularity with which “disruptive political energies” emerged through literary mediums in the early nineteenth century.74 This thesis engages with a range of literary forms to help establish the multiple ways in which the early Haitian state was imagined; depictions that were often constructed in reaction to American and British debates concerning political legitimacy that were constantly revisited in the early nineteenth century.

The chapters in this thesis, therefore, examine how different forms of governance and moments of political change in Haiti were represented by a range of different observers and political thinkers in America and Britain. Each chapter aims to underline how these depictions of Haiti reflected domestic political anxieties on both sides of the Atlantic. The first chapter focuses on the memories of the 1791-1804 Revolution by three writers who all claimed to have visited the island during the revolutionary campaign. Writing some years after their experiences—and in the immediate aftermath of Haiti’s independence—these writers published texts between 1805 and 1808 that particularly focused on the actions of France’s colonial governors during the latter years of the Revolution. The emergence of an independent Haitian state caused onlookers such as those explored in this chapter to reflect on the legitimacy of the governance and political leadership that had been present during the Revolution. For these three writers, the ineffective, weak and self-serving leadership of the governors sent to quell the Revolution was not simply ‘evidence’ of the weakness of the French military or the French national character. Rather, their failed efforts were viewed through an analytical lens of what should constitute effective, legitimate governance in the ever-increasingly turbulent and uncertain political space of the New World. For British observers, the Haitian Revolution—

74 Gilmartin, Literary Conservatism, 2.
and the French mismanagement of it—served as a stark warning of the need to re-evaluate British approaches to colonial governance, especially at a time when Britain’s colonial governors were being accused of similar despotism and self-serving actions as the ex-governors of France’s former colony. For Americans debating the best political direction for the early American republic, the failings of the Saint-Domingue governors and officers provided further proof of the unique demands of the New World and that Old World approaches to governance were doomed to failure. This chapter, therefore, suggests that for some Atlantic observers, memories of the Revolution were used to project a number of ideas related to effective, legitimate governance for the political states of the New World.

The second chapter is situated in a similar time period as the first—the early 1800s—but instead focuses on transatlantic reactions to Haitian independence and, more specifically, to the figure of Haiti’s first head of state—Jean-Jacques Dessalines. This section explores reactions to Dessalines in newspapers, periodicals and literary texts—reactions which were largely framed within discourses asserting the illegitimacy of post-revolutionary, self-created sovereigns. Although Dessalines received pockets of support from American and British depictions, his presence as a political leader was largely derided. However, rather than simply being a race-based reaction to the presence of a black leader of the Western hemisphere’s first independent black state, the depictions explored in this chapter suggest that derisions of Dessalines served to strengthen American and British denunciations of the perceived illegitimacy of another self-created leader of a post-revolutionary state—Napoleon Bonaparte. The depictions explored in this chapter suggest that for some observers, Dessalines’s decision to appoint himself as Emperor of Haiti in the same year that Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France was as damaging as his race in American and British reactions. American republicans and British loyalists often constructed representations of Dessalines to draw parallels between the ideologies of these self-proclaimed emperors of post-revolutionary entities. In this way, the figure of Dessalines ultimately served to underline the illegitimacy of Napoleon’s political leadership and to reinforce the idea that either America or
Britain represented the only true form of respectable, stable and legitimate governance.

The succession of Henry Christophe as leader of the north of Haiti following Dessalines’s death in 1806 is the focus of the third chapter. In particular, this section explores how Christophe’s decision to establish the Kingdom of Haiti in 1811 was received in America and Britain and how the King of Haiti was subsequently depicted in newspapers, periodicals, and literature until his death in 1820. Christophe’s coronation and his presence on the Atlantic stage throughout the 1810s as the self-proclaimed “first crowned king of the New World” came at a time when American republicans more vociferously derided the dynastic regimes of the Old World. In particular, after the end of the War of 1812, Americans looked to finally separate the ideologies of American republicanism from Europe’s hereditary monarchies—and in such discourses the Haitian monarch was equally derided for his adoption of an allegedly regressive, archaic mode of governance. However, some Americans—mostly those who wished to trade with the Haitian state—in fact defended Christophe’s monarchy and formed arguments in favour of its legitimacy, despite and often in contradiction to a continuing discourse of derision towards European monarchies. British reactions to the Haitian monarchy were largely favourable. After the end of Napoleon’s rule over most of Europe in 1815, British loyalist discourses celebrated the stability and superiority of monarchical forms of governance. Although these narratives stopped short of fully legitimising the self-created New World king, Christophe’s successes in implementing successful education and agricultural programs were used as proof of the virtues of monarchical rule in loyalist celebrations. In this way, on both sides of the Atlantic Haiti’s first and only monarch emerged as an important political figure in debates around the legitimacy or otherwise of monarchical rule in the Atlantic world.

The final chapter explores how Christophe’s death in 1820—and the emergence of Jean-Pierre Boyer—was reported and represented in newspapers, literary texts and prints, and how these representations contributed to anti-monarchical
narratives in both America and Britain in the early 1820s. Despite the domestic crises of the late 1810s, Americans were largely united in their belief that their republican form of government was one that deserved to be lauded and universally admired. Americans increasingly cemented the division between America’s progressive republican ideologies and the oppression of Old World regimes. Therefore, the death of Haiti’s monarch and the emergence of a republican leader in the Haitian state were both framed within American discourses that celebrated the virtues of republicanism. The revolution against Christophe by his own citizens and troops that preceded his death was similarly lauded by British radicals who had become increasingly republican in their writings since the late 1810s. The uprising against the Haitian monarch was situated within narratives of growing discontent of the British government and the newly-crowned George IV as well as discourses that celebrated the republican revolutions sweeping Europe in 1820. Boyer’s unification of Haiti under one single form of republican rule after Christophe’s death was praised by British radicals who legitimised Haiti’s new form of government and depicted it as evidence of the universal desire for republican rule and of the archaic nature on dynastic monarchy. Although these narratives often sought to generally legitimise the notion of republicanism itself, a number of commentators used Haiti’s republican turn as a central argument to formally recognise the Haitian state. In this way, Haiti’s reaction against monarchical oppression and its adoption of republican principles united republicans and radicals on both sides of the Atlantic in their celebration of the Haitian republic—celebrations that once again had debates surrounding political legitimacy and sovereignty at their core.

This thesis analyses a range of depictions of the early Haitian state from a number of distinct moments in its history—moments that were perceived in positive and negative lights at different times and by different people. By focusing on these reactions to political change and transition in Haiti—and how these moments elicited both derision and support from various quarters—it is possible to better understand the political ideologies and tensions that were central to American and British imaginings of Haiti in the early nineteenth
century. Although the presence of the Atlantic world’s first black republic was undoubtedly confronting for the white political elites of America and Britain, the depictions of Haiti outlined in this study ultimately suggest that in order to fully understand the complexity and nuanced nature of reactions to the early Haitian state, they demand to be considered in the context of more domestic political anxieties and conflicts for America and Britain in the early nineteenth century. By analysing these ‘alternative’ lenses through which Haiti was viewed, this thesis will underline the significant impact that the Haitian state had on American and British political discourse in the early nineteenth century—an impact that transcended racial, social and political boundaries.
Chapter One

Saint-Domingue 'Remembered': Lessons of the Haitian Revolution for Atlantic World Governance

After Jean Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti’s independence from France on 1 January 1804, the loss of France’s most prized colony continued to be reflected on in British and American discourses—considerations that tended to exist almost exclusively within abolitionist debates. In Britain, the victory of the revolutionaries gave a new immediacy and poignancy to an abolition campaign that had lost momentum.1 Meanwhile, by the end of the Revolution some British commentators were citing the events in Saint-Domingue as ‘evidence’ in their anti-colonial discourses.2 American commentators also anxiously debated what consequences the close presence of a post-slavery independent state could have for its own southern slave states. In particular, such discussions often centred on a fear of the revolutionary spirit of the black Haitians being transported to America’s own enslaved populations.3 On both sides of the Atlantic, early memories of the Revolution became central to discussions of the viability and security of the system of slavery as well as arguments concerning black ability. Abolitionists argued that the Revolution was an inevitable consequence of the barbarity of slavery and used it as proof that the system could no longer be sustained. Pro-slavery supporters, on the other hand, highlighted the apparently meddling nature of abolitionists and how this had been a key factor in the uprising. These depictions of the events on the island led to the self-congratulation of some planters and slave-owners for the fact that a similar revolution had not occurred in the British colonies or on American soil. Such

1 Geggus, "British Opinion," 143.
3 White, Encountering Revolution, 124-165.
interpretations hinged on the apparent ‘humanity’ of British and American slave-owners in comparison with the ‘barbaric’ form of French colonial slavery.\(^4\)

While memories of the Revolution were therefore central to debates concerning the system of slavery, this chapter focuses on three writers who were more concerned with the policies and modes of governance found on the island during the Revolution—something that these writers argued were pivotal to the loss of France's colony. Marcus Rainsford, Pierre Franc McCallum, and Leonora Sansay all claimed to have witnessed first-hand the last years of the Revolution and between 1805-1808 all three writers produced texts that were published in the aftermath of the Haitian revolutionaries’ victory over France. At a time when memories of the Revolution were largely confined to debates concerning abolitionism, these three texts were unique, as the subject of Haiti was not primarily used to propagate overtly pro- or anti-slavery agendas.

To be sure, as others have highlighted it is possible to infer each writer's leanings on the issue of slavery from within their texts.\(^5\) However, this chapter proposes that for these commentators whether colonial slavery should exist or not was largely a moot point. Instead, the texts that Rainsford, McCallum and Sansay produced demonstrate how for some observers the loss of France's prized colony prompted an urgent reconsideration into how colonies and states in the Americas should operate. These texts, therefore, demand to be analysed as part of a more general evaluation of legitimate, effective forms of New World governance. This chapter argues that for all three writers the Revolution was evidence that Old World approaches to governance were not necessarily

\(^4\) Ibid., 129.

\(^5\) As David Geggus has highlighted, Rainsford’s stance is “inconsistent” and is certainly not explicit: Geggus, "British Opinion," 148. Although McCallum appears to support the abolition of the slave trade, his only discussion of slavery itself is cloaked in ambiguity: Pierre F. McCallum, *Travels in Trinidad During the Months of February, March and April, 1803. In a Series of Letters, Addressed to a Member of the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain.* (Liverpool: W. Jones, 1805), 338-350. Scholars have argued that Sansay’s text permeates with a fear of emancipation and black political and social power: Clavin, "Race, Revolution," 12; Hoermann, "'A Very Hell of Horrors'?," 3-6.
conducive to the unique—and potentially volatile—social and political conditions of the New World. Therefore, the success of the Haitian revolutionaries demonstrated the need for a re-consideration of British approaches to colonial governance and of the most effective form of political leadership for early America.

The first author to form part of this discussion is the British soldier, Marcus Rainsford. Little is known about Rainsford other than that he was a British military officer who served in the Caribbean at the end of the eighteenth century. Rainsford claims to have been in Saint-Domingue towards the end of 1799, but recent research suggests he had in fact left by that time and was more likely to have been on the island in the previous year. Nonetheless, Rainsford went on to publish two early accounts of his experiences on the island before revising and elaborating on these texts in his third version—the much-lengthier *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805). This account in particular became the subject of much attention in Britain and would eventually be translated into two other languages. As Younquist and Pierrot have highlighted it became, for the time, the “standard British account of Haitian independence”. Rainsford’s account and the engravings included in it are still often used as an important historiographical source for the Revolution. Despite this, other scholars now question how reliable the account is because of the alleged ambiguity of dates within his texts and the question of the short amount of time Rainsford himself admitted to being on the island. As Rainsford himself said in the text, the history of the Revolution as presented in his *Historical Account* was largely based on Bryan Edwards’s depiction of the Revolution, which was published in the early

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7. Ibid.


years of the uprising. Along with the help of Edwards's writing, Rainsford's account of the last years of the Revolution and the early days of Haitian independence—by which time he had long-returned home to Britain—must also have been pieced together from numerous newspaper accounts. However, this chapter contends that the authenticity of Rainsford's text is less significant than how Rainsford wanted the Revolution to be remembered and the potential motivations behind this carefully-constructed depiction.

In the same year as Rainsford's publication Pierre Franc McCallum presented his own first-hand account of the latter days of the Revolution to the British public. McCallum appears briefly in Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld* as the ghostwriter for the Duke of York's mistress but, as James Epstein has since outlined, McCallum's writings are far more diverse and significant than the “hack” journalism of which he is accused. Precise details of McCallum's life are scarce, operating as he did as a “footloose adventurer drifting through the Atlantic world”. It appears that McCallum spent some time in Saint-Domingue at the height of the Revolution before escaping to Philadelphia in 1802 having been accused of being a spy by revolutionary troops. McCallum then returned to the Caribbean—this time to Trinidad in February 1803. In 1805 McCallum published *Travels in Trinidad*—a text he wrote to “awaken the attention of those whose department it is to watch over the interests of my country” and to assist in granting “a more mild and equitable Administration of Government into the ISLAND OF TRINIDAD”. Although Rainsford would seek to achieve this more indirectly, both texts were ultimately concerned with the future of Britain’s colonies—something that framed their depictions of the Revolution.

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10 Edwards was a former planter in Jamaica and British politician. See Bryan Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo* (London: John Stockdale, 1797).
A significant backdrop to both of these texts was the conduct of British governors in the “lawless frontier” of the British Caribbean—a particularly pertinent issue by 1805. Most significantly, Thomas Picton—the former governor of Trinidad—had been formally accused of torture and the unlawful killing of slaves and free citizens without due process. As these charges became more publicly known Picton was attacked in numerous newspapers and pamphlets in Britain, although he still found significant pockets of support—even from within British political circles. In the preface of his text, McCallum outlined that its purpose was to highlight “the atrocities of which the Island of Trinidad has unhappily been the theatre” and he situated himself as a “spectator of a line of conduct on the part of the British Governor, which would have disgraced the Tyrant of the Continent”. McCallum’s dislike of Picton was clear and understandable: only a couple of years previous to the publication of the text, Picton had thrown McCallum in jail on trumped-up charges of espionage. McCallum’s text aimed to attack Picton not just on a personal level but also more generally to uncover the modes of colonial despotism he clearly felt were present in the colonies, especially in Trinidad. McCallum therefore explicitly stated that his text was published to “expose the tyranny of British colonial rule to metropolitan view,” although the main focus of this writing was on his time in Trinidad. The text nevertheless includes some telling passages on the Revolution—passages that helped to further his critique of Picton’s form of rule and to outline alternative approaches for Britain’s colonial governors.

While scholars such as Youngquist and Pierrot have highlighted the anti-colonial messages that resonate in Rainsford’s writing, others have argued that he stops short of creating an anti-colonial argument because of his failure to “debunk the

15 James Epstein provides a detailed analysis of the accusations levelled at Picton and the criticism he received back in Britain. See Scandal of Colonial Rule, 13-45.
16 McCallum, Travels in Trinidad, iv.
17 Epstein, Scandal of Colonial Rule, 10.
concept of overall cultural superiority of the white race”.

What is undeniable, however, is that Rainsford’s writing is a valuable insight into how Haiti’s defeat of their mother country prompted some British observers to re-evaluate British approaches to colonial governance. Although Rainsford never referred to Picton directly in his own text, it is hard to believe that reports of the conduct of a British governor in a British colony could have escaped the attention of an “acute political analyst” such as Rainsford. Similarly, it is unlikely that these reports would have failed to elicit a response from a figure who had worked for years in and around Britain’s colonies. Although McCallum operated in radical ‘underworld’ spaces, Rainsford very much lived in military circles. It is easy to understand, therefore, any reluctance on his part to overtly criticise a hitherto celebrated general of the British army such as Picton. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that his Historical Account instead more subtly drew parallels between the charges levelled at Picton and the actions of the French generals in charge during the Revolution. In doing so, Rainsford presented to the British public an example of the catastrophic consequences of colonial misrule at a time when the role of colonial governors—and the parameters within which they should operate—had been outlined to the British public.

It is important to acknowledge that both of these texts were produced at a time when anti-French sentiment had become increasingly prominent in British writing, particularly after Britain’s renewal of hostilities with France in 1803. In particular, British texts that remembered the Revolution in the early years of

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19 Pierrot, ""Our Hero"," 589.
20 For an overview of Rainsford's military career see Youngquist and Pierrot, "Introduction."
21 A number of detailed studies have outlined British literary depictions of Napoleon and France in the early nineteenth century: Simon Bainbridge, Napoleon and English Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Semmel, Napoleon and the British; Mark Philp, ed. Resisting Napoleon: The British Response to the Threat of Invasion, 1797-1815 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
Haitian independence often intertwined anti-French sentiment in their abolitionist or pro-slavery arguments. Although criticism of French policies and the agents sent to carry these out is overtly present in these texts, both Rainsford and McCallum were more astute in their social and political observations than to be dismissed as anti-French propagandists. Both authors viewed the mistakes of the French government as pointing to an inability to perceive the unique socio-political conditions of the New World—an inability that cost France the so-called ‘Pearl of the Antilles’. Rainsford in particular has been accused of being “Francophobic” and some have dismissed his writing as “little more than propaganda pamphlets”. While this chapter agrees with Grégory Pierrot that such criticisms levelled at Rainsford are accurate to a degree, it also proposes that at the heart of both Rainsford and McCallum’s texts are more nuanced political motivations that are often overlooked. More specifically, the Frenchness of the colony’s governors was downplayed in order to universalise the flaws in their approaches to colonial governance—and, importantly, to allow parallels to be drawn with increasingly infamous reports of similar tyranny in Britain’s own Caribbean colonies, particularly in Trinidad. In doing so, both Rainsford and McCallum combined the question of legitimate colonial governance with the concept of national identity for their British audiences. This was particularly poignant at a time when the actions of colonial agents—and how these actions reflected British national character—were a source of contention in Britain. Christopher Bayly’s work has highlighted how colonial governors in the nineteenth century played up their nationalism in order to deflect criticism back home, while others have detailed the ways in which the actions of colonial actors were used to assert or deny their ‘Britishness’. In this way, Rainsford and McCallum’s texts provide a valuable insight

22 Pierrot, “‘Our Hero’,” 584-596.
23 Francophobia is an accusation often levelled at Rainsford. See for example Philippe R. Girard, “War Unleashed: The Use of War Dogs During the Haitian War of Independence,” Napoleonica. La Revue, no. 15 (2012/3), 96. C.L.R James was equally dismissive of Rainsford’s account: James, The Black Jacobins, 388.
24 Pierrot, “‘Our Hero’,” 581.
25 Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 122. For a collection of insightful case studies of the notion of “imperial careering”, see David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds. Colonial
into the ways in which colonial leadership was legitimised—or otherwise—through British lenses.

Three years after the publication of both Rainsford’s and McCallum’s texts, Leonora Sansay published her novel: Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo (1808). Details of Sansay’s life are vague but it seems that in 1802 Sansay landed in Saint-Domingue from Philadelphia with her husband, Louis Sansay, who was a French colonist.26 Her Secret History was presented as a series of letters written during Sansay’s time on the island from the fictional ‘Mary’ to Sansay’s real-life friend (and, some have claimed, lover) Aaron Burr—the former vice president of the United States. Although Sansay’s text functions primarily as a novel, recently uncovered correspondence between Sansay and Burr—written from Saint-Domingue—shows that the scenes depicted are informed by and reflective of Sansay’s own experiences on the island at such a crucial and destructive time of the Revolution.27 Therefore, although artistic licence was undoubtedly employed in sections of the novel, the text nonetheless gives a unique insight into the latter part of the Revolution.

The text is an invaluable historiographical source as an eye-witness account of the Revolution but a significant amount of scholarly work has rightly highlighted its function as a critique of oppressive attitudes towards women as well as an early celebration of the virtues of the early American republic.28 Recent scholarly

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27 Although little evidence has been uncovered to confirm the two embarked on an affair, the intimacy of these letters and other correspondence between the two at least confirms a very close friendship: Joan Dayan, Haiti, History and the Gods (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 165-170. See also Drexler’s introduction for an overview of Sansay’s life.
28 For a discussion of how the novel situates itself within the political context of early republican culture see Michael J. Drexler, “Introduction,” in Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura, ed. Michael J. Drexler (Canada: Broadview Editions, 2008), 10-37; Drexler, ”The Displacement of the American
work on *Secret History* has also called for the novel to be read in a framework of Atlantic colonialism. For example, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has highlighted how Sansay demonstrated the oppressive and destructive nature of colonial slavery, while other scholars have exposed a fear of black sovereignty and political power that permeates the novel.\(^{29}\) However, what is often overlooked in analyses of the novel is how Sansay used the Revolution as a vehicle to reaffirm the characteristics and policies that are most appropriate for the early American republic to adopt in order to thrive on the Atlantic stage. At the time her novel was published, Sansay was witnessing the still-young American republic's attempts to assert a stable foothold in the volatile space of Atlantic world politics. Debates still abounded as to what style of government and political leadership would best serve the interests of the American people and the future prosperity of the fledgling republic.\(^{30}\) Just as vociferous were the debates surrounding the extent to which the American people should be allowed to have say in the governing of the early republic—a discourse that had continued since the end of the American Revolution. By remembering the misguided policies and actions of the French governments and its colonial governors, and the voices that were both heeded and ignored, Sansay was able to highlight the unique and demanding socio-political climate of the Americas—a climate unsuited to Old World approaches to governance.

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\(^{29}\) Dillon, "Secret History."; Liu, "Race, Gender and Freedom."  
\(^{30}\) The clash of political ideologies between Jefferson’s Democratic-Republican party and the Federalists is outlined in Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 276-314.
It is important to note in a discussion such as this, that in all three texts the Revolution was framed as an avoidable conflict and that ultimately the colony had been ‘lost’ due to governmental ineptitude. As historians have highlighted, contemporary observers on both sides of the Atlantic looked to “particularise” the rebellion as an event that could have only occurred on Saint-Domingue and one that had been a direct result of the island’s exceptionally brutal implementation of colonial slavery. Such contemporary accounts framed the Revolution as “apolitical” and one in which black agency was absent.\(^{31}\) In a similar vein, for all three writers Haitian independence was not something won by the revolutionaries but something that had been accidentally granted by the ineffectual management of the colony. This is, of course, indicative of the “silencing” of Haiti in Britain and America in the nineteenth century that Michel Rolph Trouillot so expertly highlighted.\(^{32}\) As will be discussed in the chapter, for all three writers black agency was pushed to the margins—if not erased altogether. It has been argued that Rainsford in fact aimed to depict the “glory” of the Revolution and to recorrect its depiction as a “historical fluke” by contemporary observers.\(^{33}\) Indeed, as will be discussed in this chapter, Rainsford undoubtedly asserted agency to the black revolutionaries—certainly far more so than McCallum or Sansay. Rainsford nevertheless still devoted large sections of his account to the ineffective policies and actions of the French governors. This was an important strategy for all three texts—texts that aimed to outline lessons for effective New World governance. In downplaying the revolutionaries’ agency, Haitian independence became an unthinkable act—one that could only occur if ‘allowed’ by misguided governmental policies and leadership. Ultimately, all three writers looked to the ill-considered policies of the French government and its governors as a central factor in order to make the Revolution more ‘thinkable’ for British and American audiences—and in turn, the ‘unthinkability’ of black revolution was underlined in order to emphasise the necessity of political guidance suited to the fragile and potentially volatile political climate of the New World.


\(^{32}\) Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 70-107.

\(^{33}\) Youngquist and Pierrot, "Introduction," xxxiv-xxxv.
Tracing the “Origin of Revolutionary Spirit”

In their attempts to extrapolate political lessons from the Revolution, both Rainsford and McCallum ‘remembered’ the actions and events which had led to France losing its most prized colony in the Caribbean. Whereas Sansay’s novel was largely uninterested in the origins of the Revolution and instead concentrated on French attempts to counter the revolutionaries, analysing how the Revolution had come to pass formed an integral part of Rainsford’s—and to a lesser extent McCallum’s—text. Rainsford’s and McCallum’s writing both largely pushed discussions of whether slavery was a precursor to the Revolution to the margins of their narratives. Black agency in the origins of the Revolution was scarcely considered and the actions of the white colonists prior to the Revolution were hardly mentioned at all. Instead, both writers looked to the actions and decisions of France’s newly formed National Assembly in relation to the rising tensions in Saint-Domingue. For both writers, the excessive external interference of metropolitan France had a catastrophically damaging effect on Saint-Domingue during the time of the Revolution—a pertinent lesson for a British Caribbean that was facing the reality of a post-abolition world.

A crucial factor of Rainsford’s critique was the need for a level of autonomy for colonial governments. He claimed that the General Assembly at St Marc in 1790 had, in general, the support of the colonists because they had addressed the “objects of abuse” of previous governors and had proposed “means for their remedy”. These solutions, according to Rainsford, included revising the laws

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34 In the early years of the Revolution a number of confusing and contradictory decrees regarding governance in Saint-Domingue were issued by the French National Assembly. These decrees at times alluded to governmental autonomy in the colony, while at other times they reasserted metropolitan control. They also at different times gave and took away the political rights of the colony’s free-coloured population. For more details of the different Assemblies and French policies in the early days of the Revolution see Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 60-151; James, *The Black Jacobins*, 27-144.

35 In March 1790, the French National Assembly issued a decree that gave full legislative power to the General Assembly in Saint-Domingue. News of this
for slaves, addressing the “political incapacities of the mulattoes”, and preparing “a new colonial constitution”. In short, according to Rainsford, the colonial government had proceeded to adequately manage and secure the island in the early days of the uprising. For Rainsford “more fatal” than the original movements of rebellion on the island was a decree issued in October 1790 by the National Assembly in France that effectively dissolved St Marc’s General Assembly. According to Rainsford, this decree charged the General Assembly with “disaffection to France”, stripped away its legislative power, forbade its members from ever serving as committee members or as political advisers in the colony again, and instilled its own self-approved Colonial Assembly to carry out metropolitan orders. A number of these deposed members immediately arranged to sail for France to confront the National Assembly and assert their right to govern the colony—a journey Rainsford claimed was supported by the general population of colonists who offered “tears and blessings” at their departure and whose “prayers were everywhere preferred [sic] for the success which their forbearance was considered to deserve”. Rainsford viewed this as particularly damaging to the relationship between the metropole and the white populations of the colony, even going so far as to liken the decision to the “revival of the ancient system of despotism”. As a result, the newly appointed Colonial Assembly “became the objects of the warmest resentment” among the colony’s inhabitants.

Rainsford’s text was also scathing towards the French government’s attempts at managing the simmering tensions between the free black and white populations

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37 Members of the General Assembly initially refused to recognise this decree until they were forcibly removed by three commissioners that had been appointed by France to help govern the colony: Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 143-146; Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 184-185.
38 Rainsford, *Historical Account*, 123.
39 Ibid., 120.
40 Ibid., 124-125.
on the island. Rainsford’s opinion on the rights of free people of colour was ambiguous but he clearly saw the decision by the metropole to impose decrees which alluded to rights for the free people of colour as particularly incendiary and he stressed that this led to a “general commotion of the colony”. Rainsford detailed—through Edwards’s account of the Revolution—the violence that allegedly succeeded this decree on the island. Despite the initial opposition to the decree, Rainsford noted that “the return of general quiet was contemplated” after the Colonial Assembly agreed to recognise the decree. However, Rainsford again looked to metropolitan interference as exacerbating tensions in the colony. The decision of the National Assembly to renege on their own decree and to revoke the rights of the free-born persons of colour was remembered as delivering a “fresh and most tremendous blow” to this “devoted colony”. By pointing to the decision to rescind a decree that he claimed was “becoming the medium of peace in the colony”, Rainsford was able to reinforce his idea that this decision—and more generally the continuing interferences from the metropole—pointed to a distinct lack of perceptiveness or care of the reality of the situation of the colony at this time.

These sentiments were largely echoed in McCallum’s writing. He also denounced the National Assembly’s dissolution of the General Assembly and implementation of its own Colonial Assembly and governors. In similar rhetoric to Rainsford, McCallum surmised that “the National Assembly became an accomplice in oppression, because they sent armies of free men to maintain the reign of despotism”. Like Rainsford, McCallum refused to make explicit his views on the political rights of the colony’s mulattoes. He did emphasise, however, that the May 1791 decree that gave rights to a number of free people of

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41 Here Rainsford was alluding to the decree by the National Assembly on 15 May 1791 that granted political rights to a limited number of persons of colour who were born to free parents. News of this decree reached the colonists by July, initially prompting a revolt among colonists. However, on 21 September 1791 the Colonial Assembly at St Marc officially recognised the decree—only for the National Assembly in France to revoke it three days later, news of which reached the colony by the end of the year: Rainsford, *Historical Account*, 134.

42 Ibid., 150-151.

colour was “the cause of all the subsequent evils St. Domingo has sustained”. He stated that “the whites were struck with consternation” and their actions “bordered on phrenzy [sic]”.44 Therefore, McCallum asserted metropolitan agency in the creation of a state of disorder and chaos in the colony—and, as with Rainsford, this was portrayed as helping to create the right kind of conditions for colonial rule to fall apart and the origins of revolutionary spirit to be fostered.

In order to highlight the potentially catastrophic results of unnecessary metropolitan interference in the colonies, both Rainsford and McCallum went on to outline the results of the National Assembly’s decisions—decisions made without consulting the inhabitants of the island. McCallum speculated that prior to these interferences, “the slaves…remained in their accustomed state of subordination” and that it was only in the midst of this legislative chaos that “the least symptom of insurrection appeared amongst them”.45 Rainsford likewise suggested that the Assembly presented the enslaved population with a unique opportunity by publicly granting rights for free men of colour and that “among the new arrangements taking place” the black slaves of the island “began to consider of some melioration for themselves”. 46 Rainsford went one further than McCallum by suggesting that in flirting with the possibility of rights—and therefore power for the mulatto population—this in itself provided the black slaves with an even greater reason to fight for freedom. According to Rainsford, because the mulattoes “had always been considered by the negroes as their severest masters”, the black enslaved population would have felt “no great pleasure in contemplating an acquisition of power by the mulattoes”.47 For both authors, not only did the National Assembly inadvertently promote civil unrest among its free populations but the chaos that ensued also afforded a unique opportunity for (and even gave extra impetus to) its enslaved black population to take advantage of the planters’ distracted focus and launch their revolution.

44 Ibid., 315-316.
45 Ibid., 316.
46 Rainsford, Historical Account, 134.
47 Ibid., 134.
This was a particularly pertinent lesson at a time when the notion of rights for free people of colour in Britain’s own colonies was a source of heated discussion. In particular, in Trinidad a number of British colonists in fact petitioned for certain rights to be granted to the free people of colour, only for Picton to suppress their call.\(^{48}\) Despite the outrage that Picton’s decision provoked among some back in Britain, it seems that this was a point on which Rainsford and Picton agreed.

It is clear that Rainsford—and to an extent McCallum—remembered the beginnings of the Revolution as being fuelled as much by metropolitan interference and inadequacy as it was by simmering racial and social tensions. The numerous and confusing decrees and rescissions imposed on the colony by the mother country were depicted as anything but maternal in nature; their decisions instilled distrust of the metropole among the colony’s inhabitants and seemed to be made without due consideration of the unique situation in which the colony found itself on the eve of revolution. Rainsford even found some semblance of sympathy with the planters, whom he claims were unfairly held to blame for the rescission of the decree of rights to the freed coloured population and that this in turn led to a distrust of colonists as “deceptive negotiators” among the colony’s free population.\(^{49}\) Rainsford viewed the perceived meddling of the National Assembly as particularly crucial to fostering an untrusting and volatile atmosphere among the numerous social factions of the island and in fatally stoking the embers of political unrest among the island’s distinct populations.

In both texts, McCallum and Rainsford looked back on the “origin of the revolutionary spirit” as only emanating partially—if at all—from the black populations of the island.\(^{50}\) Black agency in the beginning of the Revolution was almost eradicated completely as the black revolutionaries were portrayed as mere opportunists who took advantage of a scene of chaos and confusion that


\(^{49}\) Rainsford, *Historical Account*, 151.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 108.
had been inadvertently orchestrated by the excessive interference of the mother country. The numerous decisions undertaken by the National Assembly were largely “the result of men coolly sitting down to provide remedies for the worst of circumstances, at so great a distance from the scene of action, and unaffected by its immediate difficulties”. The warning was a significant one for Britain at a time when the fate of the British slave trade and of its colonies in the Caribbean hung in the balance. Neither Rainsford nor McCallum engaged in any great detail with discussions surrounding the moral or economic implications of abolitionism. Instead, they focused on highlighting the danger of excessive metropolitan influence in the colonies, regardless of whether abolition was going to occur or not. In so doing, both authors side-stepped debates surrounding abolition to assert that the ‘correct’ metropolitan approaches to governance were crucial to the safety of the colonies as a whole. In their versions of the Revolution, France’s interferences served to help no one except for the black revolutionaries.

As Elizabeth Bohls has highlighted Bryan Edwards’s account used the Revolution to prove that “unwarranted metropolitan interference” could lead to disaster and that British observers needed to “take colonial culture—crucially differing from their own—into consideration”. By the time McCallum’s and Rainsford’s texts were published, colonial governors increasingly ruled with “very free rein” and Britain had initiated a “more intrusive” Colonial Office to oversee its colonial affairs. In this light and the perceived danger that British approaches to colonial rule were aligning with the French in Saint-Domingue, Rainsford and McCallum echoed Edwards’s call for colonial political agency. However, both writers furthered Edwards’s observations by emphasising the need for the right kind of governor to oversee and legitimise this form of political leadership.

51 Ibid., 161.
52 Elizabeth A. Bohls, Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770–1833 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 83; 115.
53 Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 194.
It is these observations that led McCallum to conclude that “political tranquillity can only be enjoyed in a country blessed with a free constitution”. This observation preceded his descriptions of the interferences of the National Assembly and he appeared to lament that “the situation of the American colonies is very different” in that this “freedom” was rarely found. By alluding to free constitutions and by tracing the beginnings of Saint-Domingue’s revolution back to the metropole, McCallum suggested that the colonies should at the very least have a significant say in any potential legislation or decision-making under the right governor. Likewise, Rainsford concluded his text by asserting that “no deliberative body should prescribe for the internal polity of a country at a distance, such as precludes an intimate and constant knowledge of its concerns”. Although this statement was made in relation to the possibility of enduring Haitian independence and even though Rainsford claimed that “whether [this principle] militate or not against the policy of retaining distant colonies will not be argued”, it is nonetheless a valuable insight into Rainsford’s view on the notion of external governance of the colonies. For Rainsford, the view of the National Assembly that its colonists were not legitimate political actors in the colony was a fatal oversight. To highlight this, Rainsford outlined the potential of the General Assembly at St Marc’s to implement real positive change in Saint-Domingue as tensions were escalating and he thus highlighted for his reader the ability of a colonial body to more aptly judge the demands of its fragile society and to act accordingly.

Leclerc and Rochambeau: The Wrong Kind of Governors

For Rainsford, McCallum and Sansay, the lack of perceptiveness from the French government extended to their appointment of unsuitable political and military leaders to quell the Revolution. Although Rainsford in particular advocated colonial agency in the decision-making process of future policies for the New World colonies, all three writers clearly stressed the importance of the right

54 McCallum, Travels in Trinidad, 314.
55 Rainsford, Historical Account, 363-364.
56 Ibid., 363.
officials to enact this legislation. Therefore, a central focus of their analyses was the generals sent by Napoleon to reassert French authority in Saint-Domingue: Charles Leclerc and his successor, Donatien-Marie-Joseph de Vimeur, vicomte de Rochambeau. Initially, the figures of both Leclerc and Rochambeau were well received in Britain and America as popular opinion generally desired an end to the Revolution—and, importantly, one which involved white European victory. This support soon eroded, however, as both Leclerc and Rochambeau became renowned for their violent attempts to subjugate the black revolutionaries and to reinstate French control on the island.57 British writers in particular used accounts of their brutality as part of increasingly vehement anti-French rhetoric and support for the French generals deteriorated particularly rapidly after it emerged that Leclerc had deceived and imprisoned the leader of the Revolution, Toussaint Louverture. Toussaint’s abilities in sustaining the Revolution had drawn admirers from both Britain and America. Reports that Leclerc had not only tricked Toussaint but had also sent him to die in a remote prison cell in France were met with a wave of criticism, particularly in Britain. Toussaint’s death quickly became mythologised and served to underpin the notion of French barbarity and dishonour in war at a time of increasing hostility towards France in both Britain and America.58

As Joan Dayan has noted, the last few years of the Revolution were “unparalleled in their brutality”.59 Therefore, it is unsurprising that the harsh tactics employed by both Leclerc and Rochambeau have been a continuous factor in representations of the Haitian Revolution both in the early years of Haitian independence and in more recent commentaries. However, although Leclerc and Rochambeau’s alleged barbarity was outlined in the accounts of Rainsford, McCallum and Sansay, exactly how the generals failed to counter the Revolution was a more central concern in all three texts. All three authors made their belief

57 For an overview of Leclerc and Rochambeau’s time in charge see Girard, Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon, 101-247; Dubois, Avengers of the New World, 154-301.
58 The most insightful analyses of how Toussaint was depicted in Britain in this time can be seen in Pierrot, “‘Our Hero’.”; Kaplan, “Black Heroes/White Writers.”
59 Dayan, Haiti, History, 152.
clear that at the time of the arrival of Leclerc and then Rochambeau the Revolution was far from a foregone conclusion and that it could still have been supressed and stabilised. But the appointment of successive governors who time and again demonstrated an inability—or at times an unwillingness—to act in the best interests of the colony was depicted as a more damaging blow to the French colonists and the French government than the actions of the revolutionaries. In this way, all three writers were able to assert the unique socio-political climate of the Americas—one that could not rely on Old World approaches to political leadership.

While in America in August 1802, McCallum advertised a publication titled *The Crimes of St Domingo*—a text apparently designed to outline the disgraceful character and actions of Leclerc. For unknown reasons, the book was never published. Nonetheless it is still evidence of McCallum’s interest in documenting and bringing to public attention the despotism of colonial governors—something he would achieve three years later with *Travels in Trinidad*. Although McCallum did not directly compare Picton with Leclerc in *Travels*, by reminding his readers of the disgraced French general McCallum invited his readers to draw parallels between the two and to suggest that colonial despotism was not a distinctly French affair. McCallum’s attack on Leclerc was brief but savage. The French general was mocked as a “silly, ignorant, contemptible coxcomb” for failing to understand that a man “fighting for his freedom, of whatever nation or complexion, is no contemptible foe”. But more seriously than this, McCallum outlined the “indiscriminate murdering and drowning [of] so many of the Haytians”. Leclerc’s approach to warfare was such that “humanity revolts with indignation” and was proof for McCallum that he was a “cruel tyrannical monster”. Allusions to Leclerc’s brutal tactics were a prominent inclusion to a text designed to outline the tyranny of a British colonial governor accused of murder and torture. By reminding his audience of the ruthless nature of Leclerc’s

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61 Ibid., 325-330.
rule immediately before he detailed his vicious assessment of Picton, McCallum invited his readers to judge the British governor through a similar lens.

For McCallum, Leclerc’s lack of foresight led to his demise and his death was attributed to the failure of his “schemes”.62 But more significantly, this occurred only after he had committed “all the mischiefs which were in his power”. Leclerc’s mode of governing was remembered as one that had been centred on abuses of power and a lack of civilised leadership and this was another important parallel that McCallum subtly drew with Picton—a governor who “for five years...continued in the exercise of almost unlimited power”. For McCallum, Picton’s abuse of power clearly had parallels with the French general’s deception and capture of Toussaint. Contrary to Leclerc’s claim that Toussaint “has continued to conspire”, McCallum asserted that he would “defy even the most malignant calumniator, the most malicious miscreant of Bonaparte’s adherents or advocates, to produce the least proof of Toussaint’s treacherous behaviour since the amnesty”—an amnesty which, McCallum added poignantly, “was granted to him by Le Clerc”.63 In recalling the by now infamous story of Leclerc’s under-hand capture of Toussaint—one that had been met with outcry in Britain—McCallum again drew parallels with accusations that Picton had imprisoned, tortured, and in some cases murdered free blacks and even British officers in Trinidad on accusations of treason. Most significantly, in another parallel with Leclerc, such charges and their punishments were administered often without due process. McCallum himself had been subjected to Picton’s form of despotic rule and seemed to view his own imprisonment as a similarly unjust example of colonial despotism. Thus, McCallum ended his critique of Leclerc with a supposed denunciation of universal tyranny but which was actually a thinly veiled desire for the demise of both Leclerc and Picton, hoping that “every tyrant speedily follow him, to give the world repose”.64

62 Ibid., 330.
63 Ibid., 329.
64 Ibid., 330.
In a similar vein, central to Rainsford’s critique of Leclerc were the reports of atrocities committed under the general’s rule. As with McCallum, Rainsford claimed to be most disturbed by reports that captured revolutionaries were taken out to sea and killed or simply drowned in numbers so great that the tide eventually brought the corpses back to shore—an act that Rainsford made even more explicit in one of the striking images to accompany the text. In the same passage, Rainsford described the use of bloodhounds by the French troops to hunt down the black revolutionaries—something also alluded briefly to in McCallum’s text and which for Rainsford only served to “aid and fill up the measure of their enormities”.  

Philippe Girard has provided evidence that bloodhounds were, in fact, not introduced to the Revolution until after Leclerc’s death at the end of 1802. Whether Rainsford and McCallum were aware of this is unknown, but they most likely chose to include the story anyway due to its infamy in British newspaper accounts of Leclerc at this time and this is something which helped both authors to underline their scathing assessments of the general. Either way, the inclusion of such a claim was particularly central to Rainsford’s claim that the French had committed equally horrific acts as the revolutionaries and that the French general had not only allowed such acts of barbarity to happen, but that his inability to stall the progress of the Revolution had driven his troops to such desperate measures.

Following Leclerc’s death from yellow fever in late 1802, responsibility for securing France’s re-capture of Saint-Domingue fell to Rochambeau, “an aristocrat who bore one of the most illustrious names in the Americas”. In a continuation of the types of representations of Leclerc in Britain and America, memories of the brutal regime of Rochambeau and his ruthless extermination of large numbers of the island’s black population were seized upon by British and American observers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Girard has questioned whether Rochambeau’s legacy as a “sadistic butcher” is fully deserved but he concedes that the “shocking” manner of his cruelty is what gives

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65 Ibid., 330; Rainsford, *Historical Account*, 325-328.
him a “unique place in the rich annals of human cruelty”. Rainsford certainly seized on this reputation in his own denunciation of the French general. In Rainsford’s account, the use of bloodhounds under Rochambeau’s rule was even more brutal than under Leclerc, as the new governor allegedly allowed captured blacks to be eaten alive by the dogs. While Rainsford certainly offered no excuse for such an act, he suggested that the perilous state of the colony and the lack of stable and effective leadership inevitably led the troops to such measures, concluding that “[s]uch is the deterioration of the human mind, under a pressure of such circumstances”. In this sense, as with Leclerc, Rochambeau’s inability to successfully drive back the black revolutionaries had ultimately driven his own troops to such inhumanity through sheer desperation.

The fact that McCallum and Rainsford both focused on the apparent barbarity of the French generals should not be dismissed simply as evidence of an overtly Francophobic agenda. While this cannot be discounted, neither should the fact that the question of acceptable, humane colonial governance had been brought very publicly to the minds of the British public by the charges brought against one of Britain’s own former colonial governors. In 1803, Thomas Picton faced charges of murder—a case which was immediately brought to the King’s Bench and which lasted for four years. Picton was accused of decapitating, killing and burning Trinidadian slaves he suspected of practising forms of black magic. For British observers, possibly more serious were the accusations that he had condemned a British soldier accused of rape to death without trial. As governor, Picton was said to be operating in a political space in which he was unbounded by measures of accountability. In both McCallum’s and Rainsford’s texts the lack of parameters in which Leclerc and Rochambeau operated offers a striking parallel to Picton’s governing of Trinidad and one which should not be overlooked. If, as Epstein suggests, Picton’s case formed part of “a wider conflict over the future of British colonial rule in the Caribbean” then Rainsford directly contributed to this discourse by highlighting similar actions of colonial misrule

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68 Ibid., 234-236.
69 Rainsford, Historical Account, 339.
70 Epstein, Scandal of Colonial Rule, 90.
in Saint-Domingue—actions with disastrous and horrific results.\(^{71}\) More specifically, Rainsford’s and McCallum’s accounts came at a time when despotism in the colonies had “disrupted prevailing notions of humane imperial governance” back in Britain and had jeopardised “a secure sense of nationalist imperial character”.\(^{72}\) Therefore, their remembering of Leclerc and Rochambeau served to not only denounce the inhumanity of French leadership but more pertinently it reminded British readers of the potentially-catastrophic consequences of allowing colonial governors to act with such unrestricted cruelty—something which both stained the national character and served to fan the flames of black revolutionary spirit.

In addition to the alleged barbarities committed by the French generals, Rainsford stressed the deficiencies in morality and character of both leaders—flaws that had particularly catastrophic consequences in the unique mix of classes, ethnicities and ambitions of the New World. In particular, Leclerc was remembered as “so weak a governor” that it was inevitable he would be unable to suppress the black troops.\(^{73}\) Perhaps more importantly, this weakness was exacerbated by his ego and vanity. Leclerc was apparently “impatient to open his splendid career” and his first military involvement on the island was rushed in order to impress his friends who were “sufficiently ripe and numerous for his reception”.\(^{74}\) In Leclerc, Rainsford saw a colonial governor who “considered only his own aggrandizement” and whose actions were served to satisfy personal ambitions as opposed to acting in the best interests of the colony and its inhabitants.\(^{75}\) Rainsford claimed that, as a result, Leclerc failed to establish a stable colonial government and the “insubordinate state” that emerged in its absence “assumed a complexion more sanguinary and terrible than can be conceived among a civilised people”.\(^{76}\) The impact of Leclerc’s self-serving form of leadership was an important lesson for Britain’s colonies, particularly in light

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\(^{73}\) Rainsford, *Historical Account*, 315.  
\(^{74}\) Ibid., 268.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid., 312.  
\(^{76}\) Ibid., 326.
of accusations that Picton had been operating in Trinidad with similar reckless abandon. Picton was said to have filled Trinidadian seats of power with his closest allies and looked to constantly improve his financial situation on the colony.\textsuperscript{77} The example of Leclerc was held up in Rainsford’s text as a warning over appointing governors who were interested primarily in self-advancement and attainment—something which was often pursued at the expense of sufficient care for the colony and which enabled revolutions to not only begin but thrive.

Rainsford’s disdain for the colony’s failed leaders was clearly echoed by Sansay. As others have noted, Sansay clearly depicted the governors—along with the French army as a whole—as major factors in the demise of the colony.\textsuperscript{78} But what is often under-appreciated is how Sansay’s analysis of their character and actions served as a vehicle through which she was able to assert lessons that could be drawn from these failed models of New World leadership. Her contempt for Leclerc’s rule was laid bare in a series of letters Sansay wrote to Aaron Burr, some years before the publication of her novel.\textsuperscript{79} In one such letter dated 6 May 1803, Sansay unleashed a brief but vicious assessment of Leclerc’s time in the colony. In it she claimed that despite the arrest of Toussaint “we are still far from that tranquillity so much desired”. She asserted that the Revolution would have been suitably suppressed from this point on had the island been under the control of a more competent governor. But Leclerc, she wrote, “was without energy—tormented by jealousy for his wife, deceived by his officers, impos’d [sic] on by the black chiefs with whom he was always in conference... he only thought of saving himself by evacuating the place”. In the ultimate insult to the character of Leclerc, Sansay claimed that he wanted to flee the colony following a number of heavy defeats by the black revolutionaries, something which reflected Rainsford’s claim of Leclerc’s lack of allegiance to the colony or to France. In a

\textsuperscript{78} Dayan, \textit{Haiti, History}, 156; White, \textit{Encountering Revolution}, 167.
\textsuperscript{79} These letters were originally documented in C. Burdett, \textit{Margaret Moncrieffe; the First Love of Aaron Burr} (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 428-37. More recently, Michael Drexler has brought them to light and highlighted their importance as one of the few sources available for biographical details of Sansay’s life: Drexler, "Appendix A."
final, damning statement, Sansay concluded her assessment by reporting his
death to “fever” and surmising that “it was the best thing he could do, for if he
had continued alive he would have liv’d dishonour’d”. It is clear, therefore, that
Sansay believed that France could have prevailed against the revolutionaries,
especially after the capture of Toussaint. However, she suggested that the
decision to put in charge of the expedition a weak general prone to jealousy and
deception as well as lacking in wisdom was fatal to French attempts to quash the
uprising.

These ideas were furthered in the novel itself as Sansay stressed the damaging
consequences of a colonial leader who was drawn in by the personal economic
potential of the New World. She highlighted how Leclerc’s penchant for the
personal accruement of wealth, despite the condition of the colony, had
disastrous consequences even for his own army: “[Leclerc] has shocked every
body by having ordered a superb service of plate, made of the money intended to
pay the army, while the poor soldiers, badly cloathed [sic], and still more badly
fed, are asking alms in the street, and absolutely dying of want”. Similar to
Rainsford’s commentary, Sansay’s criticism of Leclerc centred on his inability or
unwillingness, to consider what was in the best interests of the inhabitants of the
colony. In this sense, Leclerc was again portrayed as a direct contributor to the
suffering of the officers and colonists he should have been helping. As Sansay’s
protagonist asked sarcastically: “why should such trifling considerations as the
preservation of soldiers, prevent a general in chief from eating out of silver
dishes?”

Despite her clear disdain for Leclerc, Sansay reserved her most scathing criticism
for Rochambeau. Sansay’s protagonist, Mary, was immediately sceptical that
Rochambeau’s management of the colony would be as self-serving as Leclerc’s.

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80 Drexler, "Appendix A," 224.
81 Leonora Sansay, Secret History; or the Horrors of St. Domingo. In a Series of
Letters, Written by a Lady at Cape Francois to Colonel Burr, Late Vice-President of
the United States, Principally During the Command of General Rochambeau
The fact that Rochambeau declared a “grand ball” upon his arrival was proof enough for Mary that he “bears pleasure as well as conquest in his train”.\(^{82}\) Instead of bringing the political guidance and military acumen so hoped for and needed by the island’s colonists, the colony’s inhabitants “are in danger...of being satiated with pleasure”.\(^{83}\) Sansay thus portrayed Rochambeau as the kind of pleasure-seeking and self-centred governor that the New World colonies attracted but who were ultimately doomed to failure. This view of Rochambeau was clearly a prominent one in the colony at the time. In another letter to Burr, Sansay detailed a confrontation between the general and the husband of a woman Rochambeau was allegedly pursuing. Sansay apparently witnessed the affronted husband who “vented his wrath in a long speech, representing how abominable it was for a person who should be the father of the colony, and the protection of it’s [sic] inhabitants, to seek to trouble the repose and destroy the peace of the family’s [sic]”.\(^{84}\) This scene was reflected in the novel as Sansay clearly argued that colonial governors—and political leaders as a whole—should exert a sense of paternalism over the population but that Rochambeau had ultimately failed as the ‘father of the colony’.

It is in these passages that what constituted the ‘horrors’ of Saint-Domingue was called drastically into question. In addition to the threat posed by the black revolutionaries, the island’s colonists found “in the army sent to defend them, oppressors who appear to seek their destruction” and as a result “the creoles, who had remained on the island during the reign of Toussaint, regret the change, and say that they were less vexed by the negroes than by those who have come to protect them”.\(^{85}\) Sansay emphasised the increasingly despotic nature of Rochambeau’s rule and its impact on the island’s population as “[e]veryone trembles for his own safety, and silent horror reigns throughout the place”. In the novel, the French general’s tyranny was indiscriminate and ruthless, and numerous acts of embezzlement and extortion by Rochambeau and his men

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\(^{82}\) Ibid., 21-22.  
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 33.  
\(^{84}\) Drexler, “Appendix A,” 229.  
\(^{85}\) Sansay, *Secret History*, 33-34.
towards the colony’s merchants were outlined. For Sansay, more than the violence of the Revolution, these were the real horrors of Saint-Domingue. In allowing such tyrannical forms of government to persist, the damaging effect for the island’s population was clear to see as a “settled gloom pervades the place and everyone trembles lest he should be the next victim of a monster from whose power there is no retreat”.86

Sansay’s portrayal of the damaging impact of such despotic and self-serving forms of rule in the New World certainly suggested a genuine concern for other colonies which may be subjected to the machinations of similar governors. Nevertheless, Sansay’s writing should also be read within a framework of American political discourses at this time that debated the best mode of governance for the early American republic. In particular, Sansay’s rhetoric aligned itself with narratives that attacked American Federalists for their reliance on traditional political hierarchies—forms of governance that were based on European models of political power.87 Sansay’s critique of the political and military failures in Saint-Domingue highlighted more generally that European approaches to governance in the New World as a whole—including the early American republic—were ill suited and could have disastrous consequences. Furthermore, this criticism came at a time when the Democratic-Republican attack on monocracy in America had advanced considerably and their abhorrence of specific abuses of political power had become increasingly more vocal.88 Therefore, Sansay’s memories of Leclerc and Rochambeau served to remind American readers of the need for a system of government that restricted excessive power to be invested in individuals and which ensured that its leaders had well-defined parameters within which to operate.

86 Ibid., 100-103.
87 Wood, Empire of Liberty, 276.
88 Wilentz, American Democracy, 106-107.
Who is Fit to Govern this New World?

A significant part of these three authors’ political analyses were the conclusions they drew as to how New World governance should function. Rainsford clearly believed that a level of political autonomy in the colonies could be beneficial. He wrote approvingly of the attempts of the General Assembly at St Marc to implement policies that were in the best interests of the colony and he claimed that “germs of genius” may have existed within the French colony. But, as he soon made clear, a state that was dependent on temporal systems of government severely hindered any opportunities for this ‘genius’ to flourish. As such, the “officers of government may be able and good, but their dominion is too short to conciliate any local affection, and an expedient temporization will and must always supersede even ordinary virtue”. Rainsford thus suggested that the unique nature of the New World colonies demanded a fresh approach from the metropole. He claimed that the appointment of leaders such as Manduit, who were “devoted to the old system” and who harked back to “ancient despotism” was a mistake. In particular, Rainsford claimed that leaders such as these were “bent upon counter-projects against every act of the General Assembly” and as a consequence “did not fail to strike a blow to the interests of the colony”.

For Rainsford the appointment of leaders who could work with and for the colony was an integral factor in the success and security of the New World colonies. This was something that he felt was distinctly lacking in Saint-Domingue and so he looked closer to home for a model of exemplary colonial leadership. His Historical Account included a brief, but telling, footnote in which he drew a “noble contrast” between the weakness and deception of Leclerc and the “gallantry and benevolence” of George Walpole, the British general largely credited with suppressing the Second Maroon War in Jamaica in 1795. In this section of the text, Rainsford described a proclamation that Leclerc allegedly issued to the citizens of the Cape—a proclamation designed to deceive the black population.

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89 Rainsford, *Historical Account*, 96-97.
90 Ibid., 114.
91 Ibid., 310.
revolutionaries into believing that France had granted “liberty to all”. Rainsford situated the “abject baseness” of Leclerc’s deception alongside claims that during the insurrection of the Jamaican Maroons Walpole had refused an act proposed by the British government because it might have “inveigle[d]” the mulatto revolutionaries. More honourably than this, Rainsford pointed out, Walpole had instigated “regular treaties” with the leaders of the Second Maroon War. Furthermore, Walpole had apparently foregone any recognition of achievement from Britain for his service to Jamaica “because he did not conceive his engagements with them perfectly fulfilled”—a show of humility that could not have been further removed from Leclerc’s penchant for fame and public honour. 92

This comparison allowed Rainsford to underline the importance of decisive yet moderate leaders such as Walpole in the British colonies, especially at such a potentially volatile time. As Epstein has highlighted, Picton’s violent disposition meant his character was often called into question, while other historians have highlighted how British colonial agents more generally “had their British identities fractured by virtue of operating outside the conventional limits of British imperial activity”. 93 By bringing to his readers' attention the memory of Walpole—and by comparing this with the brutality and unfairness of Leclerc—Rainsford was able to once more emphasise the importance of maintaining a sense of British virtue in colonial governance.

Unlike Rainsford, Sansay claimed to have witnessed one example of colonial governance in Saint-Domingue that she suggested may have been the alternative that the colony needed. Sansay outlined brief but telling praise for “general

Closelle”—probably a reference to Bertrand Clauzel—who, according to Mary, was placed briefly in charge at Cape Francois while Rochambeau was engaged in affairs in Port-au-Prince. Clauzel was a marshal of France who had distinguished himself in the French revolutionary wars and in Italy before arriving in Saint-Domingue some time in 1802. In Sansay’s novel, depictions of his brief but positive impact on the Cape and its inhabitants provided a stark contrast to the destructive nature of Rochambeau. Unlike his counterpart, Clauzel “gives no balls, no concerts” and appeared so concerned with restoring some moral fibre to the Cape that “he has had the church fitted up, and the fete dieu has been celebrated with great order, magnificence and solemnity”. In a break away from Rochambeau’s licentiousness and its damaging effect on colonial society, Clauzel provided a more perceptive and dignified response to the burgeoning crisis. While this allusion to Clauzel was brief, Sansay was clearly keen to stress his duty of care to the colony: “he has put everything on a new footing; the fortifications are repairing, and block-houses are erecting all round the town”. Clauzel was also, rather poignantly, “not a favourite with the ladies and therefore no threat to the men of the island”. The paternal nature of Clauzel’s actions were not ignored by the general population and the unifying and rejuvenating impact he had on the Cape’s colonists was clear: “[t]he measures of general Closelle [sic] inspire them with confidence; and they think that if he was commander in chief, all would go well”. The suggestion was clear—had France appointed a leader capable of displaying moderate and thoughtful governance, Saint-Domingue could have survived the Revolution. The more general lesson for Sansay and for early America was the importance of employing political leaders who had the interests of the public at heart, and not their own self-gain.

In addition to this consideration of individual leaders, Sansay underlined the importance of aptly considering the various racial dynamics at play in order to implement effective New World governance. More importantly, Sansay looked back on the Revolution as proof of the catastrophes that could occur if political

95 Ibid., 67.
leaders looked to exclude permanently everyone outside of the white, male elite from political circles. This is not to suggest that Sansay included the black populations of Saint-Domingue and early America in this call for political inclusion—as her silencing of the political agency of the black revolutionaries indicates, she clearly believed that even these free black populations should be exempt from the politics of the New World. However, if Americans long after their own revolution still “argued fiercely about the nature and extent of their power as part of the collective sovereign” then Sansay contributed to this debate by asserting the collective legitimacy of New World creoles as a political identity that demanded consideration and even consultation in governmental affairs.\(^96\)

While debates still abounded in American political discourses regarding the extent to which ‘the people’ should have a say in the early American republic, Sansay’s novel served to outline the potential consequences of silencing the people who are most in tune with the demands and tensions of their country. As Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has persuasively argued, Sansay ultimately attempted to write a “creole novel”. For Dillon, Sansay’s initial criticisms of the Saint-Dominguan creole character gave way to an admiration for their “superior capacities for self-support that are revealed by the violent upheaval of revolution”.\(^97\) Although Dillon effectively argues how this praise was exemplified through the resilience of the creole women in the novel, Sansay was also eager to stress the role that Saint-Dominguan creoles could have played in alleviating the colony’s crisis—a role they were denied by the prejudicial ignorance of the French generals and officers. As others have argued, Sansay appropriated some of her characters in the novel with an American creole identity and this was clearly a form of identification to which she seemed to relate or at the very least defend.\(^98\) Sean Goudie has explored the ways in which an American creole identity was at times asserted or denied in American politics and culture in this


\(^{97}\) Dillon, "Secret History," 88.

\(^{98}\) Adams-Campbell, "Romantic Revolutions," 134.
time and how it was often portrayed as an opposite to the “degenerate” West Indian creole even when this identity was appropriated.\textsuperscript{99} In this respect, Sansay defended both the notion of an American creole identity and, to a lesser extent, the character of West Indian creoles by outlining the folly of denying creoles a political voice at a time when an intimate knowledge of the social, racial and political intricacies of the colony was most needed—a trap into which Sansay clearly feared America was falling.

Within her critique of Leclerc, Sansay alluded to the potential positive impact of creole society on the growing crisis. Sansay emphasised Leclerc’s foolishness in attempting to negotiate with the black leaders of the island while the creoles, who were “accustomed to the climate and acquainted with the manner of fighting the Negroes” were ignored and their advice easily dismissed.\textsuperscript{100} For Sansay, the decision to disregard the locals of the island in such a way as well as placing faith in the black generals of the Revolution inevitably led to Leclerc’s and the island’s downfall, which was predicted by the creoles themselves who “shake their heads and predict much ill”. This critique was further exemplified in her contrast of the “pusillanimous” Leclerc who attempted to flee the battle, as opposed to the “guard nationale, composed chiefly of creoles, [who] did wonders”.\textsuperscript{101} In doing so, Sansay stressed that it was the creole troops who fought the battle with honour and, more importantly, with skill and aptitude against the black rebels. The lesson was clear: blacks were not to be trusted, the colonial officers were cowardly and foolish, and it was therefore essential to seek the counsel of the locals of the colonies for effective governance, especially at a time of such social and political agitation. Sansay asserted the importance of creole agency to the New World as they offered a more permanent alternative to the colonists of the Old World. In essence, whereas Europeans came to the New World bent on plunder, it was the creoles who built and rebuilt the colonies in

\textsuperscript{100} Sansay, \textit{Secret History}, 9.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 16.
search of long-term stability and prosperity. In stark contrast to the perceptions of the self-centred French general who sought temporary pleasure and accruement of wealth at the cost of the colony, it was the creoles who “build houses” and “rebuild those that were burned” around Rochambeau.\footnote{Ibid., 70.} In this way, Sansay painted a vivid picture of the Saint-Dominguan creoles attempting to rebuild a colony partly destroyed by a slave revolution but also ruined by the short-sightedness and greed of European colonists and the very same generals who had been sent to protect them.

It is important to note that Sansay was reserved in her praise for creole character and behaviour. The novel contained numerous depictions of creole women as vain, jealous and ruled by emotion rather than logic or intellect. Despite this, Sansay appeared to identify herself as an American creole and the struggle and necessity of negotiating a new political identity in the changing Atlantic world was a struggle shared with the citizens of the still-new American republic. In one scene, in particular, Sansay appeared to align directly with what she viewed as a necessary rejection of Old World values and identity. When the wife of the creole “Monsieur C----” was addressed as “citoyenne” by a French officer, her refusal to answer to such a title was met with surprise and indignation by the officer who claimed “she ought to be proud of being so called”.\footnote{Ibid., 37.} The wife’s husband subsequently defended her decision to the officer, resulting in a duel between the pair. When Sansay depicted the victory of Monsieur C over his “antagonist” what she in fact depicted was an ideological victory of creole defiance over French oppression. As Drexler has argued, Sansay in general depicted creoles in the novel as “victims of both a conspiracy from above and a revolution from below”.\footnote{Michael Drexler, “Brigands and Nuns: The Vernacular Sociology of Collectivity after the Haitian Revolution,” in \textit{Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies}, ed. Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 190.} But in this scene Sansay was able to depict a rare creole victory. The creole husband and wife not only asserted their new political identity—one separated from their colonial mother country—but
also, more poignantly, the French officer suffered because of his inability to consider and adapt to the new socio-political conditions of the New World. Likewise, in ignoring the counsel and welfare of these inhabitants, both Leclerc and Rochambeau also demonstrated for Sansay an inability to consider the unique socio-political nature of the Americas. In highlighting their failure to factor this into their management of the colony and their reliance on Old World ideas and policies unsuitable for the volatile nature of the New World states, Sansay also managed to outline the necessity of a political identity and voice for creoles throughout the Atlantic world—a lesson which needed to be heard and heeded by New World governments.

**Toussaint’s "Perfect System of Equality" (Re)Imagined**

In considering how these three writers looked back on events in Saint-Domingue for lessons of governance in the New World, it is important to consider their respective treatments of the leader of the Revolution and the self-proclaimed governor of the island—Toussaint Louverture. Toussaint’s authority over the black revolutionaries on the island was well renowned and his military successes over the Spanish, British and French forces simultaneously struck fear in the hearts of French generals and brought almost universal admiration overseas. As Pierrot has demonstrated, stories of his “magnanimity and anecdotes on his generosity” were widespread between 1799 and 1802. Toussaint’s status of celebrity and the public outpourings of adulation in Britain and America would only increase after his death in France in 1803, following his capture and imprisonment by Leclerc’s troops at the end of 1802. The folklore surrounding Toussaint continued to grow after Haiti’s Declaration of Independence in 1804

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105 Pierrot, ""Our Hero"," 584.
106 In these final years of the Revolution, it appears that British writers more enthusiastically engaged with the figure of Toussaint. For analyses of the ways in which he was represented in British literary circles see: Marcus Wood, ed. *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 229-239; Kaplan, "Black Heroes/White Writers", 37-46; Pierrot, ""Our Hero"," 599-601.
and, by the time that these three texts were published, Haiti and memories of the Revolution were synonymous with the legend of Toussaint.

Both Rainsford and McCallum placed Toussaint as a central feature in their narratives. But before analysing the political role that representations of Toussaint had in these texts, it is important to note that this is not the only function that depictions of the celebrated leader would have had. As Matthew Clavin has pointed out, depictions of the Haitian Revolution in literary texts at the beginning of the nineteenth century provided a significant selling point in a crowded literary market place in both Britain and America and the same could certainly be said for depictions of the famed leader of the Revolution.\footnote{Clavin, "Race, Revolution," 3.} By the time of the publication of Rainsford’s and McCallum’s texts Toussaint was not just a widely discussed figure in British newspapers and periodicals but he was already the main focus of numerous literary texts. Two of the most well known of these texts were \textit{The History of Toussaint Louverture} (1803)—written by the abolitionist James Stephen—and William Wordsworth’s “To Toussaint Louverture” (1803). Narratives such as these eulogised the revolutionary leader as a heroic yet humble example of black capability and reflected a transatlantic fixation with stories of the ex-slave who had defeated Napoleon’s forces. Rainsford and McCallum undoubtedly looked to situate their texts within a growing body of literature in Britain at this time that was concerned with the growing myth of the revolutionary leader.

Both Rainsford and McCallum tried to assert a unique place for their texts by suggesting that they reputedly met with Toussaint personally and by hinting at a level of intimacy with the leader. Personal accounts of meetings with Toussaint were almost unheard of at this time in Britain and both authors almost certainly stressed their own personal encounters in order to give their texts a unique selling point. But by claiming to have received a personal audience with the revolutionary leader, both authors were also able to assert a heightened sense of authority and agency in their discussions of colonial matters. Each wanted to be
perceived not simply as another observer to events in Saint-Domingue but as someone engaged directly with the key figures of the Revolution—and therefore someone well placed to analyse and comment on the reasons for the loss of France’s colony.

Assertions of intimacy with the leader of the Revolution were displayed in different ways in both texts. Rainsford claimed that Toussaint personally intervened in his trial in the colony when black forces accused him of being a spy.108 In his 1802 pamphlet that preceded the *Historical Account*, Rainsford even claimed that the two played billiards together.109 McCallum, possibly in response to Rainsford’s claims, attempted to assert an even more intimate relationship than his British counterpart with his “much lamented friend” Toussaint.110 Two years after *Travels* was published, McCallum even claimed in a private letter that he had helped in “civilising the ignorant and deluded natives of Hayti” by assisting Toussaint in the “framing” of his constitution.111 Although the claim never made it into *Travels*, it nonetheless demonstrates a willingness to remove Toussaint’s agency from the governance of the island—governance that contemporary observers largely praised—and to amplify McCallum’s own perceived significance as a colonial actor. Perhaps more significantly, despite his clear disdain for the “ignorant” Haitians, McCallum still saw it as important to lay claim to a personal attachment and even influence over Toussaint. In contrast to Rainsford, who had cause to be grateful to Toussaint for saving his life, McCallum positioned himself—albeit privately—as the one who had helped the revolutionary leader, not the other way around. In this way McCallum clearly

111 James Epstein, “The Radical Underworld Goes Colonial: P.F. McCallum’s Travels in Trinidad,” in *Unrespectable Radicals?*, ed. Paul A. Pickering & Michael T. Davis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), 160. Although it is unclear, McCallum is almost certainly referring to Toussaint’s 1801 constitution, which declared loyalty to the French empire but which also banished slavery from the island and cemented Toussaint’s strict labour regulations: Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 238-246.
wanted his readers to view him as someone who had occupied a uniquely influential position in the political space of the New World.

These accounts undoubtedly gave extra flavour and intrigue to both authors’ texts. Pierrot has further argued that texts at this time aimed to turn Toussaint into “a British literary character to neutralize his political legacy” and that in general the majority of British politics contributed to this ‘depoliticisation’ of the revolutionary leader. However, as well as contributing to the appropriation of Toussaint into British culture, Rainsford’s and McCallum’s references to Toussaint served a more distinct political purpose—albeit not one that asserted black political agency. At a time when British depictions such as those by Wordsworth and Stephen often situated Toussaint as an antithesis to the maligned French leader Napoleon, McCallum and Rainsford offered a radical point of departure by positing Toussaint’s achievements against the perceived failings of British governors, British colonial society and even of the class-centred hierarchy found back home. Both authors looked to the policies enacted by Toussaint in his time in charge and to his general management of the colony as a measuring stick for what constituted fair and proper leadership in the New World including in Britain’s own colonies. Also, by portraying the island as prospering under Toussaint, both authors were able to assert that this type of governance was not only fair but conducive to the social and economic welfare of the New World colonies. At a time when British discourses tended to frame the black revolutionary leader in abolitionist debates or anti-French propaganda, McCallum’s and Rainsford’s texts were unique in their use of these representations as a response to the controversy surrounding Picton and to criticise British forms of governing by offering the black leader as a model to follow for New World governance.

Central to McCallum’s attack on Picton was his assertion that the British governor had forgotten “whose representative he was”. Particularly damning

112 Pierrot, “"Our Hero",” 582; 598.
113 McCallum, Travels in Trinidad, 163.
for McCallum was Picton’s disregard for acting within the realms of British law and foregoing any sense of judicial process in the sentencing of criminals, something that McCallum found directly contradictory to any sense of Britishness: “To you, Sir, in the bosom of English freedom, it will appear incredible that the representative of our Sovereign should thus dare to violate the rights of a British subject, and, by a self-created authority, illegal and infamous, thus wantonly presume on an action which the King of Great Britain dares not to venture upon”.114 Framing Picton as the antithesis of the British character was central to McCallum’s criticism of him and, as James Epstein has highlighted, McCallum essentially “juxtaposed an idealised vision of British constitutional liberty to its colonial absence”.115

McCallum found this “absence” is in his remembering of Toussaint’s Saint-Domingue. As Epstein notes, in Travels Toussaint “assumes heroic stature, his humanity standing in contrast to the inhumanities of Europeans”.116 This was a common trope for British texts that posited the black leader as the anti-Napoleon. McCallum subverted this strategy by situating Toussaint opposite Picton in order to undermine Picton’s Britishness, to attack his governance of Trinidad and, more generally, to underline the character necessary for effective governance of Britain’s colonies. Although McCallum’s writing on Toussaint certainly formed only a small part of his letters, at the very beginning of his collection he reminded his readers of his “unfortunate friend”—the “ill-fated Toussaint Louverture”.117 This reference to Toussaint was completely out of context with the rest of the letter and at first seemed an irrelevant piece of prose. But, importantly, McCallum presented his reader with two pieces of information: first, that he had had the “honour of being at the Court” of Toussaint; and second, that he believed his conduct “merited a palace instead of a dungeon”.118 At the very beginning of his text, Toussaint was invaluable to McCallum’s attempts to

114 Ibid., 166.  
115 Epstein, "Radical Underworld", 160.  
116 Epstein, Scandal of Colonial Rule, 175.  
117 McCallum, Travels in Trinidad, 9.  
118 Ibid., 9.
assert his legitimacy as an experienced authority on the New World colonies. But perhaps more significant than this is that McCallum brought to the forefront of his readers’ minds the memory of the character and conduct of the celebrated Toussaint as well as the inhumane and unjust treatment of him at the hands of the tyrannical French. Epstein has outlined how McCallum would later go on to align himself as “a fellow victim of tyranny” with Luisa Calderon—the mulatto Trinidadian girl whom Picton was charged with torturing.\textsuperscript{119} Although this alignment would come in a text McCallum published a year after his Travels, he was clearly already viewing his own imprisonment in a similar light to possibly the most famous victim of despotism in the British colonies at this time.\textsuperscript{120}

In doing so, McCallum invited his readers to remember a noble figure of authority in the New World before he outlined his scathing critique of one of Britain’s own colonial leaders. Toussaint was barely mentioned again as McCallum embarked on an unwavering discrediting of Picton’s character but before ending his text McCallum again rather poignantly and seemingly inexplicably closed his book with a “Cursory View of Events in St. Domingo”. After demonstrating Picton’s despotism and the victims of his unjust and ruthless search for all encompassing power, McCallum returned to his revered friend—someone who, in his opinion, had been “one of the best men that ever governed a kingdom” or, more poignantly, “a colony”. The initial surprise at this inclusion of a portrait of the revolutionary leader soon becomes clear as McCallum explained that Toussaint’s character “will form a striking contrast” with those of Picton and Samuel Hood, a British commissioner in Trinidad. In essence, McCallum bookended his text by reminding and \textit{re}-reminding his readers of Toussaint in order to more effectively attack Picton. In stark contrast to Picton and Hood, whom he wished to “expunge from my imagination”, the memory of Toussaint became an essential vehicle through which McCallum was able to emphasise exactly how British officials should conduct themselves within

\textsuperscript{119} Epstein, \textit{Scandal of Colonial Rule}, 38.
\textsuperscript{120} P. F. McCallum, \textit{The Trial of Governor T. Picton} (London: Dewick and Clarke, 1806).
the colonies. In contrast to the self-serving Picton, McCallum remembered that Toussaint “did all that was in his power to bring back happiness to his countrymen”. The concept of governmental office as a public service was essential to McCallum’s memory of Toussaint’s leadership. He claimed that Toussaint resisted Rigaud’s attempts to exert control over Saint Domingue because he believed that Rigaud “aimed at supreme authority” something which Toussaint “could not reconcile himself to”. McCallum reported that troops promoted under Toussaint had been told that “the distinction they were raised to, ought to be considered but the reward of honor, courage, and unblemished conduct in private life” and that Toussaint had warned these figures of authority that “the misconduct of public men brought on society more fatal consequences than that of other citizens”. In this way McCallum gave Toussaint a voice—one that was used to denounce the disgraced British governor and that warned future governors from following a similar path of despotism.

Ultimately, McCallum painted a vivid picture of utopian colonial authority during Toussaint’s leadership. Picton’s Trinidad was a world away from Toussaint’s Saint-Domingue, in which leaders were promoted but only if they “had for their motive and object the public welfare” and who, “before they should think of themselves...impartiality and justice ought to dictate all their decisions”. McCallum stressed that this fair and just mode of governance stemmed directly from the example set by its leader and, in Saint-Domingue’s case, one who “never swerved from the rules of justice” and who had “nothing in view but the prosperity of the colony”. In doing so, McCallum suggested that the example set by a black ex-slave in the midst of a bloody revolution was undeniably preferable to the example of governance set by the British governor of Trinidad. Therefore, despite his own private claims to being the architect of Toussaint’s constitution, McCallum publicly asserted Toussaint’s political agency. Rather

121 McCallum, *Travels in Trinidad*, 313.
122 André Rigaud was leader of the southern provinces of the island. Initially allies, Rigaud and Louverture were at war with one another by the late 1790s: Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 231-237; James, *The Black Jacobins*, 234-235.
124 Ibid., 318; 326.
than being an example of black potential, a figure of sympathy or evidence of French despotism, Toussaint was thus remembered as a New World leader of substance and value, which was something particularly poignant in light of the tyranny witnessed in a British territory.

In a similar vein, central to Rainsford’s depiction of Toussaint’s successful governance was the harsh but fair nature of his system for justice on the island—something Rainsford allegedly witnessed first-hand. Rainsford claimed that Toussaint had saved him from the death penalty after he had been accused of being a spy by other leaders of the Revolution.125 Youngquist and Pierrot point out that this story gave Rainsford’s history “a romantic aura” because, after all, “[w]ho in England owed Toussaint his life?”126 However, more than this, Toussaint’s intervention was depicted as the ultimate example of just governance in contrast to the severity of Leclerc, Rochambeau and even Picton. Like McCallum, Rainsford stressed that in Saint-Domingue “no punishment ever took place without the anxious endeavours of the General-in-Chief to avoid it”. Rainsford even adopted a similar strategy to McCallum by giving Toussaint a voice with which colonial despotism could be derided. Rainsford recalled a conversation between Toussaint and a stranger and the revolutionary leader seemed to be speaking directly to colonial governors everywhere when he stated that “‘it is not sufficient to be just, we must also be merciful, recollecting how much need we all have for mercy’”. Rainsford recalled that although Toussaint “possessed for a considerable period...unlimited power”, he “has never been charged with its abuse; but on the contrary, has preserved one line of conduct, founded...on the most honourable basis, leaning only to actions of magnamity [sic] and goodness”—a striking contrast to the conduct of the failed French leaders and the increasingly defamed British governor.127

The fact that Rainsford chose to remember Toussaint in order to outline the type of leadership necessary for New World colonies to prosper—as opposed to

125 Rainsford, Historical Account, 229-37.
126 Youngquist and Pierrot, ”Introduction,” 1.
127 Rainsford, Historical Account, 239-57.
discussing a British colonial figure such as Walpole in more detail than a footnote—has a pertinence that is often overlooked in analyses of his History. As Youngquist and Pierrot have identified, the text “offers an important corrective to writers and politicians who saw only savagery in the prospect of black independence”.128 While this is undoubtedly true, in Haiti—and particularly in Toussaint’s Saint-Domingue—Rainsford saw in more universal terms the potential of what could be achieved with progressive, liberal and inclusive forms of government. In this sense, Toussaint’s Saint-Domingue was portrayed as a world away from the regressive politics and ideals of the Old World. Historians have argued that in the early nineteenth century, the British empire “complemented features of a revivified conservative regime at home” and that colonial governments at this time—as in Britain—looked to “the creation of new tools of control and the reinvention of an aristocratic landed tradition”.129 In this context, Rainsford’s use of the memory of the Revolution was more radical than that for which he is often credited as he found in Toussaint’s system of governing aspects of equality and reform not found in Europe or even in Britain. Therefore, while his text was in part a celebration of Britishness, as proposed by Youngquist and Pierrot, it also must be read as a questioning of the rigid hierarchical political structures in place in Britain and her colonies at the time.130

An early indication of this perceived promise of Toussaint’s governance is the “perfect system of equality” Rainsford allegedly saw “for the first time” in Saint-Domingue as described in his 1802 Memoirs. This was presented in more detail as he outlined a dinner he had apparently attended at a hotel where military personnel of all ranks “sat at the table indiscriminately”. Most significantly of all, the famed Toussaint “did not take the head of the table, from the idea...that no man should be invested with superiority but in the field”.131 Three years later, in his History Rainsford would stress this idea of social inclusion and equality even further as he wrote approvingly of Toussaint as “one of those characters who

129 Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 193; 195.
130 Youngquist and Pierrot, "Introduction," lvi.
131 Rainsford, A Memoir of Transactions, 8-9.
invite the principle of an elective monarchy, but which are too rarely found to advise its universal adoption”.  

In addition to this, Toussaint “found little difficulty in the formation of a temporary constitution, of which justice and equality...should be the basis”. Although this could have been alluding patriotically to British notions of liberty, Rainsford stressed that—unlike in Britain—Toussaint’s notion of equality was based on “right only, not property”.

Elizabeth Bohls has argued that this section of Rainsford's text is proof that Rainsford saw in Haiti a “color-blind” society of infinite, utopian potential and one which amounted to a “novel social experiment”. Pierrot has also discussed this section and concluded that Rainsford removed Toussaint the individual from any political agency in creating this site of equality. However, depicting Toussaint's Saint-Domingue as a site of social equality in which leaders were elected democratically and without concern for property could not have been lost on a British audience still restricted by a rigid wealth and class-centred social hierarchy. Rainsford drew an even more direct contrast with Britain when he stated that “the situation of colonial slaves...is, in many respects, superior to that of the labourers or artizans of Britain”. More significantly, under Toussaint labour was “so much abridged, that no want of leisure was felt” which led the author to surmise that “it would be a great gratification to the feeling heart, to see the peasant in other countries with a regulated toil similar to that of the labourer in St. Domingo”. The conclusion that Rainsford drew here—that the ex-slaves of Saint-Domingue under Toussaint’s leadership were better off than Britain’s own labouring classes—would have been a hard one to ignore. Similarly, Rainsford appeared to admire the prospect for social mobility open to figures of all races and classes during the “vortex” of revolution and which was seized upon by the “able and the cunning”, including “Negroes, recollected in the

133 Ibid., 253.
134 Bohls, Politics of Place, 120; Pierrot, ""Our Hero"," 589.
135 Rainsford, Historical Account, 102.
136 Ibid., 228.
lowest state of slavery” who now “filled situations of trust and responsibility”. This potential for upward mobility in Saint-Domingue was exemplified by the rise of Toussaint who “without the adventitious aids of those born to rule, held one of the highest situations in society”. Rainsford was certainly not advocating a similar revolution in Britain or her colonies and it is clear that he celebrated his British identity in other respects. He was, however, clearly in awe of Toussaint’s rejection of Old World values and the consequences this had on Saint-Domingue society as whole. Ultimately, Rainsford painted a vivid picture of a New World society thriving once it emancipated itself not only from slavery but also from the repression of European systems of ‘democracy’ and social and political hierarchies.

In stark contrast to Rainsford and McCallum, Toussaint and most of the other black leaders of the Revolution were conspicuous in their absence from Sansay’s text. At the time that Sansay was writing her letters, Toussaint was not only a prominent figure in American newspapers but also in political discourses as the revolutionary leader was used “as a means to score points in the ongoing partisan battles preceding and following regime change in the United States”. In addition, given that Toussaint’s fame continued to grow in America in the years when Sansay’s book was published, this was a significant omission that is often overlooked in analyses of Secret History. Despite the fact that she witnessed events in Saint-Domingue at a time when Toussaint’s fame would have presided over the whole colony and even though her letters are dated around the same time of his capture and imprisonment, the leader of the Revolution was largely absent from her history. Toussaint was mentioned a total of three times in her letters, and these references were brief and contradictory. Sansay conceded that during “the reign of Toussaint the white inhabitants had been generally respected” but this appears to have been a reluctant concession.

137 Ibid., 220.
138 Drexler, “Displacement of the American Novel.”
139 Some scholars have noted the “intermittent” appearance of black actors in the novel: Dayan, Haiti, History, 158.
to the popular narrative of Toussaint in America at the time—to go completely against this would have casted doubt on the legitimacy of Sansay's text.\textsuperscript{140}

Despite this, in general Sansay attempted to call into question the popular view of the revolutionary leader in Atlantic imaginations of this time and she deliberately obfuscated the popular narratives that accompanied discussions of him. In her description of the French capture of Toussaint, Sansay claimed that the “event caused great rejoicing”—a striking alternative to William Wordsworth’s “most unhappy Man of Men”.\textsuperscript{141} Sansay claims that before Toussaint was captured, “he had his treasure buried in the woods” and that he ordered the troops who helped him with this task to be shot in order to protect his secret.\textsuperscript{142} This brief but telling portrayal of Toussaint as a cold-blooded mercenary demonstrates a clear desire to write against the popular narrative of the selfless and humane “man of the people”.\textsuperscript{143} Despite these passing allusions to the famed leader, Toussaint was decidedly absent from the rest of Sansay’s text. Given the extent of Toussaint’s fame within the island at the time that Sansay was there—and given that the leader’s fame only continued in America in the years after this—what can be said for the omission of the Revolution’s infamous leader from her novel?

To be sure—as has been highlighted elsewhere—\textit{Secret History} was written with a distinct sense of negrophobia.\textsuperscript{144} In addition to her negative portrayal of Toussaint other black leaders were only mentioned briefly and, when they were, it was to highlight their destructive nature on the colony or to demonise them as “monsters...thirsting for blood”.\textsuperscript{145} Perhaps more significantly, by reducing Toussaint to a mere footnote in her observations of the Revolution, Sansay effectively removed any notion of black agency from its history and helped to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[140] Sansay, \textit{Secret History}, 147; 174.
\item[141] William Wordsworth, “To Toussaint L’Ouverture” (1803).
\item[142] Despite the lack of evidence, this was an often-repeated story: Girard, \textit{Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon}, 107-109.
\item[143] Sansay, \textit{Secret History}, 5.
\item[144] Hoermann, ”‘A Very Hell of Horrors’?,” 5; Clavin, "Race, Revolution," 12.
\item[145] Sansay, \textit{Secret History}, 147.
\end{footnotes}
frame the success of the black revolutionaries as an unthinkable event. In addition, Gretchen Woertendyke has argued that Sansay’s choice of genre—a ‘secret history’—was made to allow herself the flexibility to both reveal and conceal information at her convenience. In this case, although her text was published four years after the declaration of Haiti’s independence—a moment when the eyes of the Atlantic world viewed with curiosity and anxiety its first black republic—this was never discussed or even mentioned in her ‘history’. Sansay’s novel ended before the colony completely succumbed to black control. In doing so, Sansay left Saint-Domingue and the Revolution suspended in a particular moment in history—a moment in which an independent Haitian state was not yet a reality. By denying Haiti’s independence space in her narrative, she effectively denied recognition of the Haitian state. Although no explanation was offered for this, this silencing of the ultimate success of the Revolution came at a time when anxiety in America was heightened not only over concerns that Haiti’s revolutionary spirit would spread to its own slave states but also over how an independent Haiti would affect America’s commercial interests in the Caribbean. Therefore, Sansay’s erasure of Haitian agency demonstrated a clear desire to see the Haitian state—and the threat it represented—fade into insignificance or to disappear from the Atlantic stage altogether.

Despite her scathing assessment of colonial governance in Saint-Domingue, Sansay clearly did not want to suggest that a model for New World governance could be found in the form of the Revolution’s ex-slave leader. Whereas Rainsford and McCallum asserted Toussaint’s agency in developing a system of rule based on moderate, thoughtful governance—and one which benefited the majority of the people on the island—Sansay sought to erase the leader from the narrative of the Revolution altogether. In contrast, McCallum and Rainsford used

147 The Revolution prompted intense debates surrounding America’s future and safety as a slave-holding republic. See White, Encountering Revolution; Dun, Dangerous Neighbors. American commentators also fervently debated whether an independent Haiti was promising or threatening for America’s commercial interests: see Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 124-152.
Toussaint as a mirror upon which other colonial leaders should be reflected, including those of Britain’s own colonies. Pierrot has observed that in general depictions of Toussaint in Britain at this time “were used as a glass through which the rising United Kingdom could look, darkly, at a more dignified and righteous version of itself”. The observations of McCallum and Rainsford of Toussaint certainly contributed to this ‘Britishisation’ of the leader of the Revolution. However, these depictions were framed in a way to critique British forms of leadership and were not intended to solely contribute to a Francophobic attack of figures such as Leclerc and Rochambeau. Their portrayal of the moderate, humane and just black leader could not have been lost on a British audience that had become familiar with stories of colonial tyranny in the British Caribbean. In this sense Toussaint became a lens through which these two authors were able to project their vision for how effective, fair—and therefore legitimate—governance should operate, particularly in Britain’s colonies.

Despite their more glowing accounts of Toussaint’s system of governance, Rainsford and McCallum—along with Sansay—ultimately relied on the idea that Haitian independence had not been won by the black revolutionaries but that rather it had been handed to them by the inadequate leadership of the French. The true horrors of Saint-Domingue presented in these texts were not the unspeakable acts of torture, rape and murder committed by both blacks and whites that preoccupied so many gothic narratives in Britain and America at the time. Rather it was the ineptitude and lack of paternal care for the colony from the leaders sent to protect its citizens and to repel the revolutionaries. In this way, although Rainsford and McCallum asserted Toussaint’s agency in the policies he enacted as governor, as with Sansay’s account his military achievements were silenced, allowing all three authors to present the Revolution as a French failure rather than a Haitian success. The Revolution was reappropriated to discuss more domestic matters than the fate of Haiti itself and

148 Pierrot, “"Our Hero”,” 602.
this undeniably reflected a reluctance to truly consider the potential of the Atlantic world’s first independent black state.

This denial of Haitian agency in turn also allowed all three authors to outline the importance of having the right type of leader and policies in place in the New World—ones that were well equipped to meet the unique socio-political demands of this ever-changing geo-political space. As Epstein notes, in general McCallum’s text presented “contrasting figures of elite masculinity” to better advance “the case for humane colonial government”, and Rainsford’s account operated in a much similar way. At a time when Britain’s colonies faced an increasingly uncertain future and when the conduct of its governors had been brought home so starkly, both writers looked back on the Revolution for models of both successful and disastrous colonial governance. But political discourses in the still-young American republic were also often concerned with the notion of correct, legitimate governance to further the economic and social potential of the nation. Americans at this time still debated—as they had since the creation of their constitution—the role of the people in American politics. In particular, Sansay’s memories of the Revolution should be read as an attempt to write against the hopes of Federal framers who still wished for passive citizens that were “deferential to national governors”. Instead, Sansay openly questioned and criticised the acts of Saint-Domingue’s governors and ultimately attempted to demonstrate the pivotal role that such short-sighted and self-fulfilling governance had had on the destruction of the once-promising colony. This criticism, along with the potentially positive role that Saint-Dominguan creoles could have played in countering the Revolution, allowed Sansay to display a sense of collective agency of the people and the need for them to speak up—and be listened to—when the political affairs of the nation were at stake. While these three authors therefore looked back on the events of the Revolution in their considerations of legitimate political leadership, in this same period a number of other observers would look upon Haiti’s first government and head of state with

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reflections which were also concerned with legitimate governance in the early 1800s.
Chapter Two

“The Bonaparte of the New World”: American and British Reactions to the Emergence of Emperor Dessalines

In a matter of weeks following Haiti’s official declaration of independence at the beginning of 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines ordered Haitian troops and the nation’s newly liberated citizens to undertake a campaign of mass genocide against the remaining white French inhabitants of Haiti—a directive that would come to define his reign in American and British discourses in the nineteenth century and beyond. Reports of the massacres spread quickly and widely among news sources in America and Britain and, as Julia Gaffield has highlighted, the impact of the massacres was such that they “altered the trajectory of the discussion about Haiti in the Atlantic world”.¹ Early reactions to Haiti’s first post-independence leader in both America and Britain were thus largely framed within accounts of the massacres, and Dessalines’s “work of death” served as proof in these reports of his “fierce…savage…brutish” nature.² Dessalines produced a number of proclamations in this time that were intended in part to justify the killings but also to underline “the determination of Haiti’s people to create a radically new order”.³ However, these proclamations were perceived by some as “the rhapsody of a man, in whose breast nature appears to have implanted some generous and lofty sentiments, all of which are borne down, and almost extinguished by a torrent of fanaticism, vindictiveness, and cruelty”.⁴ Therefore, although the massacres were intended primarily as retribution for France’s perceived crimes in the colony, Dessalines had unwittingly dealt a devastating blow to the potential for American and British public support for the new Haitian republic.

¹ Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 84.
² Morning Post, 23 July 1804; Caledonian Mercury, 13 October 1804.
³ Dubois, Haiti, 43.
⁴ Morning Post, 23 July 1804.
Not long after American and British audiences learned of the massacres, they also heard of Dessalines’s decision to adopt the title of Emperor of Haiti. Dessalines had served until this point as Governor-General-For-Life but by 6 October 1804 his new imperial title had been confirmed in a lavish ceremony in Haiti, reports of which soon made their way into British and American newspapers. This change of title was a way for Dessalines to cement his status as leader of Haiti and to further consolidate his power. The decision to adopt this imperial title was made only months after Napoleon Bonaparte—until then the First Consul of France—had decided to name himself Emperor of the French. Deborah Jenson has therefore argued that Dessalines’s motivations behind adopting the title of emperor included a desire to be seen as a political equal to Napoleon and the belief that declaring an imperial government “was a more aggressive structure for declaring independence”. This strategy nevertheless failed to secure official diplomatic recognition of Haiti’s sovereignty from America or Britain and both countries—despite pressure from within private political and mercantile circles to do otherwise—refused to sanction official trade agreements with the new Haitian state.

Until recently, Dessalines tended to remain a peripheral figure in scholarly work on post-revolutionary Haiti. Historians have observed that despite the heroism and military skill he displayed during the Revolution, the massacres quickly became an enduring factor of Dessalines’s legacy as non-Haitian authors and historians (particularly in the nineteenth century) constantly ‘remembered’ the irrational and bloodthirsty first leader of the Haitian state. Indeed, this legacy would continue well into the twentieth century as Dessalines was constantly and

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5 Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 142.
6 It is important to note that despite this lack of official recognition, American and British merchants continued to conduct business from Haiti. For an overview of the unwillingness of the American and British governments to sanction official trade treaties—and mercantile opposition to this—see: Matthewson, *Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 119-137; Gaffield, *Haitian Connections*, 124-281.
consistently remembered as “the brave monster who had won Haiti her independence”.

However, more recent studies concerned with the Haitian state’s early years have started to reconsider Haiti’s first post-independence leader as a more complex figure. Julia Gaffield, for instance, highlights the stormy conditions in which Dessalines was operating as he tried to secure diplomatic recognition and trade agreements throughout the Atlantic world. Other work has considered the impact of Dessalines’s proclamations and decrees that were designed to assert Haiti’s right to political recognition from the rest of the world. In particular, the 1805 Imperial Constitution was Haiti’s first constitution since independence and scholars have called for this—as well as Dessalines’s early proclamations—to be considered more seriously for their efforts to secure both Haiti’s independence from France as well as international diplomatic recognition from an increasingly hostile Atlantic world.

Despite this emerging focus on Haiti’s first head of state, studies have tended to overlook the impact that more domestic political concerns had on international representations of Dessalines, particularly in American and British discourses. This chapter contends that American and British perceptions of Haiti’s first post-independence leader in the early nineteenth century were neither simply based on memories of the massacres nor were they exclusively a racist reaction to the prospect of a sovereign black political leader. As Marlene Daut has highlighted, a number of narratives of the Revolution and Haitian independence relied on discourses of “black savagery” in order to frame Dessalines as an “incomprehensible demon”. While race was undoubtedly an essential driver in a number of Atlantic discourses concerned with Dessalines, to frame American and British receptions to him as solely race-based reactions to a black political

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9 Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 1-152.
11 Philip Kaisary, "‘To Break Our Chains and Form a Free People:’ Race, Nation, and Haiti’s Imperial Constitution of 1805," in Race and Nation in the Age of Emancipations, ed. Whitney Stewart and John Garrison Marks (Athens: University of Georgia Press, forthcoming).
12 Daut, Tropics of Haiti, 84-85.
leader is too limiting to fully comprehend the significance of Dessalines’s presence on the Atlantic political stage. The image of Dessalines was formed and re-formed by American and British commentators to assert a number of socio-political arguments during his reign—arguments that often had more to do with transatlantic reactions to the changing political landscape of the Atlantic world as a whole than any serious considerations of Haiti itself. These discourses thus often sought to place the issue of Dessalines’s race on the periphery of their narratives. Philippe Girard has argued that nineteenth-century historians “confined” Dessalines and Haiti “to a black and Haitian world” and that it is important to consider Dessalines as a man “inspired by, and fully integrated into, the Atlantic system in which he was raised”.  

The depictions explored in this chapter further this idea by demonstrating how the emergence of the Emperor of Haiti provoked American and British commentators to remove Dessalines from this confinement, and to place him and the Haitian empire in the middle of more general discussions of Atlantic governance and legitimacy. As Gaffield and Philip Kaisary have argued, scholarly work is yet to understand fully “the varied and enduring cultural and ideological inheritance” of Dessalines. The texts explored in this chapter therefore help to understand better the inheritance of Dessalines’s short reign for observers on both sides of the Atlantic.

To fully comprehend the impact of Dessalines’s political presence, the social and political context of the early 1800s in America and Britain must be taken into account. America’s still-young republic continued to elicit debates from its politicians and citizens as to the best way to assert a stronger foothold in the political space of the Atlantic world. Thomas Jefferson had been re-elected and the divide between the ideologies of Federalists and Democratic-Republicans intensified further. Political discussions in America centred on Federalist lamentations that what remained of traditional hierarchies was “in shambles”, something personified by the Jefferson government with its reduction in central

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governmental power and the abandonment of traditional governmental ceremonies.¹⁵ Federalists worried over America’s political security and prosperity and complained that the government was “daily insulted, at home and abroad, by men who acted as though the republic were merely a temporary expedient”.¹⁶ Jefferson supporters reacted to Federalist criticism by deriding the concept of traditional monarchies and attacking the notion of monocracy in modern, liberal governments.¹⁷ On both sides of the political spectrum, however, Americans were largely united in their assertions that the country would never again “submit to monarchy or aristocracy”.¹⁸ Therefore, depictions of Haiti’s first political leader—and particularly his decision to adopt the title of emperor—emerged at a time when American discourses not only debated the very concept of political legitimacy but also asserted America’s unique republican status as a refuge from the tyranny and despotism of Old World forms of governance.

In Britain, the Peace of Amiens had ended by 1803 and the country was again at war with France. At this time, political dialogues in Britain centred on the threat that France posed to British interests, including the very real threat of a French invasion. Loyalist commentators constructed anti-French narratives that were designed to court support for the resumption of war with the French republic. Central to these anti-French discourses were the denunciations of France’s revolutionary hero, Napoleon Bonaparte. Although early British reactions to Napoleon were “fluid and far from uniformly negative”, by 1803 a “profusion of pamphlets and caricatures attacking Bonaparte and warning of French invasion” was in effect throughout Britain.¹⁹ Stuart Semmel has argued that this

¹⁵ Wood, Empire of Liberty, 347.
¹⁶ Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 182.
¹⁷ Wood, Empire of Liberty, 347-348.
propaganda campaign was “unprecedented in its scope”. John Moores has further demonstrated how British perceptions of French political leaders in the nineteenth century were therefore redefined, with representations of Napoleon at the heart of these discourses. It is within this climate that depictions of the first leader of the Haitian state emerged in British publications. In this way, depictions of Dessalines—another leader of a new, post-revolutionary state—became entangled in British loyalist narratives that sought to discredit the legitimacy of Napoleon as a viable political leader. In particular, the fact that both leaders decided to adopt the title of emperor within months of each other meant that discussions of Napoleon and Dessalines were further aligned in denunciations of self-constructed imperial dynasties. Such discourses in turn contributed to a growing sense of British identity in reaction to the ‘illegitimate’ and ‘despotic’ form of governance found in France. By aligning the Haitian and French emperors together, British loyalists were in turn able to underline the superiority and legitimacy of Britain’s constitutional monarchy.

In a political climate that provoked recurring questions over the basis of political legitimacy on both sides of the Atlantic, Dessalines’s decision to adopt an imperial title often took precedence over his race or memories of the massacres of the French colonists. In her study of Dessalines, Deborah Jenson observes that historians from the mid-nineteenth century onwards would go on to “recontextualise” Dessalines as a “proto-Napoleonic imperial figurehead”. To expand upon this point, this chapter will demonstrate how this ‘recontextualisation’ in fact occurred in both America and Britain while Dessalines was alive. In this way, representations of Dessalines should not always be viewed as reactions against the idea of a black sovereign operating within the Atlantic world; they were also a key contributor to discourses that

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22 Marilyn Morris argues that loyalist reactions to the French Revolution were pivotal to British justifications of its own monarchy: Morris, *British Monarchy*, 1-2. For an analysis of the formation of British national identity as a reaction to foreign powers, see Colley, *Britons*.
23 Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 142-144.
sought to deride Napoleon. Ultimately, if Haiti’s declaration of independence “raised profound questions about revolutionary legitimacy and national sovereignty”, how did the presence of a self-proclaimed black emperor raise similar questions in America and Britain?²⁴

This chapter addresses this question by exploring how Dessalines was depicted in a number of American and British commentaries during his reign. In the early months of Haiti’s independence—before Dessalines’s imperial nomination—several writers and journalists displayed a willingness to overlook the massacres of the French and defended Dessalines’s and Haiti’s claims to sovereignty. Although these defences were often motivated by a desire to see America or Britain establish formal trade agreements with the new Haitian state, they nonetheless call into question the idea that transatlantic observers were collectively and vehemently against Haiti’s presence on the Atlantic stage as a sovereign political entity. However, Dessalines’s decision to adopt the title of emperor appears to have been an even more damaging blow to any potential for support from America and Britain than his orders to kill the French citizens of the island. The majority of these reports served to denounce and dismiss the first black sovereign of the Atlantic world. But they were often constructed within denunciations of Napoleon and France as writers sought to draw parallels between the ideologies and claims of legitimacy of these self-proclaimed emperors of post-revolutionary states. In this way, depictions of Dessalines in Britain and America were as much to do with discussions of governance and political legitimacy as they were about race—discussions which in turn served to reinforce the idea that America or Britain represented the only true form of respectable, stable and legitimate governance.

**American Perceptions of the New World’s First Black Emperor**

In America, Haiti’s newly declared independence led to a projection of anxieties over the presence of a black republic so close to America’s southern slave-

owning states. Plantation owners worried that the successful revolution of slaves against the might of Napoleonic France would provide inspiration for slaves throughout the Americas and that this revolutionary spirit would be transported to the southern states of America. Ashli White has demonstrated how slave owners in America described this spread of revolutionary ideas as “contagious”, partly in order to emphasise its uncontrollable nature.\(^{25}\) In this tense and fearful climate, news of the massacres of the French inhabitants of the newly independent Haiti essentially “put an end” to the notion of American support for Haiti’s claims to sovereignty and political recognition and, as such, generally ended sympathetic portrayals of Haiti’s leader.\(^{26}\) Overall it seems that American newspapers were unwilling to ignore the massacres in order to promote the potential for trade with the Haitian state. As James Dun has further demonstrated, at a time when American newspapers and politicians expressed such concern over the presence of the newly independent black state, open expressions of support for the ex-slave leader responsible for the deaths of thousands of white colonists were almost impossible to assert.\(^{27}\) Indeed, as one historian has noted, some American newspapers actually “relished this hostility, playing up its ferocity and cruelty to self-serving ends”.\(^{28}\)

Despite the negativity surrounding Dessalines at this time, it is important to note that after the massacres there were some—albeit rare—reports which claimed that the Haitian leader was being unfairly depicted in the American press. In an article informing its readers of the massacres, *The Connecticut Herald* reported in April 1804 that Dessalines was in fact a man “of great moderation” and “his conduct has been regulated by good faith”. The newspaper even went so far as to claim that he was “not unlike the unfortunate Toussaint”—a significant point of departure even from apologists of Dessalines that tended to concede that he was incomparable to the venerated Toussaint Louverture. The *Herald* tried to

\(^{26}\) Deborah Jenson, "Dessalines’s American Proclamations of the Haitian Independence," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 15, no. 1/2 (2009), 93.
\(^{27}\) Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors*, 217-223.
distance Dessalines from the massacres of the colonists by claiming that “the authority of Dessalines cannot prevent their frequent assassination”. While the report sympathised with the colonists, it also made clear that they were simply being subjected to the same kind of brutality that they themselves had perpetrated during the Revolution. Other newspapers also tried to diminish Dessalines’s agency in the massacres by claiming that his arrival in towns such as Aux Cayes meant that “tranquility was restored”. Such reports claimed that under the leadership of Dessalines no further massacres took place and that there would be a restoration of “order and good government”.

The concept of “good government” was a key indicator of support for the Haitian state and Dessalines’s status as a viable political leader. The Connecticutt Herald would go a step further only a few weeks later when it printed a letter supposedly from a Haitian resident to his friend in Baltimore. The letter asked readers to recollect the atrocities committed by Leclerc, Rochambeau and the French troops during the Revolution. It graphically described scenes of torture against black men and the inhumane killing of black women—which in effect served as a thinly-veiled defence of the Haitian massacres against the French. But, more strikingly, the letter also underlined the political legitimacy of the new Haitian state by referring to the “people of St. Domingo, [who] enter with majesty, the rank of nations”. The report alluded to the revolutionary pasts of both Britain and America and appealed for understanding from the English “who have changed your government” and most importantly from Americans “who have ceased to be Englishmen”. Reports such as this demonstrate how some observers saw the question of Haiti’s legitimacy as a political state as key to trying to stem the tide of negative perceptions of the new nation. By drawing a parallel between Haiti’s revolution and that of America’s, the legitimacy of the post-revolutionary state could be asserted emphatically.

29 Connecticutt Herald, 17 April 1804.
30 This report was widely published. See for example: Middlesex Gazette, 16 March 1804; Virginia Argus, 24 March 1804; The Hive, 27 March 1804.
31 Connecticutt Herald, 1 May 1804.
Such examples of positive depictions from American publications complicate the often-held view that “there was a united front of revulsion of a black nation” at this time. That Dessalines was apparently desirous of a commercially beneficial friendship with the American government was often at the heart of American defences of Haitian independence. Supporters of Jefferson’s trade embargo with the Haitian state argued that to lift the legislation would be to support a “Negro republic” while also potentially provoking war with France. Kerber has further noted that the embargo “had the added advantage of suffocating Haitian independence”. However, in her study of the connections between trade and diplomacy regarding America’s relationship with Haiti in the early nineteenth century, Julia Gaffield has argued that despite Jefferson’s refusal to officially recognise Haiti as a sovereign political state, “American merchants tried to act as if Haiti was an independent nation”. Gaffield further notes that American merchants in Haiti had genuinely positive experiences in Haiti and held Dessalines in relatively high regard, something they emphasised in correspondence to contacts back in America. In this context, newspaper reports which sought to absolve Dessalines from responsibility of the massacres or that attempted to align Haitian independence with America’s own revolution would have served the interests of Americans who hoped for favourable trade agreements to be negotiated between the American and Haitian governments.

Not all positive depictions of Dessalines and the early Haitian state were necessarily fuelled by pro-trade motivations, however. As Philip Kaisary and Gaffield have shown, some American observers without any clear commercial motivations also sought to defend Dessalines’s legitimacy as a strong and viable political leader. This claim is based on the unearthing of a short play performed by two seniors at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire in August 1804 that was titled: ‘A Dialogue on the Revolution in St. Domingo Between Toussaint and

32 Jenson, Beyond the Slave Narrative, 125.
33 Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 48-49.
35 Ibid., 161-165.
Dessalines’. As suggested in its title, the play was an imagined conversation between the deceased Toussaint and the leader of the new Haitian state. As Kaisary and Gaffield highlight, the play was remarkable for how it countered the common representations of the ‘brute’ Dessalines. Despite the negative stories of Dessalines that were prevalent in America by the time the play was performed, the Dartmouth students portrayed the Haitian leader as “every bit the intellectual equal” of Toussaint. When the figure of Dessalines spoke in the play he did so with power and fluency and his thoughts demonstrated “a worldliness and knowledge that traverses multiple canons and cultures”. According to Kaisary and Gaffield, the play was unique for the way in which it called for a reconsideration of Dessalines as a man of ethics and a viable statesman, while more generally “challenging assumptions about Haiti’s universal stigmatization in the early nineteenth century”.

Evidence of narratives such as this—along with newspaper reports that sought to defend or excuse Dessalines—challenge the notion that the massacres completely eradicated avenues of support for Dessalines. But assertions of the legitimacy of the Haitian leader would become even more contentious after news that Dessalines had adopted an imperial title reached American newspapers by the end of 1804. American audiences were consequently presented with not only an independent black leader of a post-revolutionary, post-colonial state but with the first black emperor in the history of the Western world. As historians have argued, Dessalines likely adopted the title to place himself and the nation as political equals with France. As well as consolidating his own power, it was a bold, considered attempt to legitimise Haiti’s political independence and to therefore place Haiti on a more stable footing to negotiate economic stability for the fledgling state. It is important to note that news of Dessalines’s decision to adopt the imperial title reached American audiences only a few months after readers had learned of Napoleon’s imperial nomination in France. Although a number of American publications would thus attempt to discredit the Haitian

37 Ibid., 10.
38 Fischer, Modernity Disavowed, 213.
leader as a “mimic emperor”, Dessalines was in fact more of a “critic emperor”.

Dessalines’s adoption of the title was a display of empowerment against Haiti’s ex-colonial rulers by demonstrating that as an independent political entity they too could adopt such imperial titles and restructure their own government.

Whatever Dessalines’s intentions, the presence of a black emperor was initially met with excessive derision in American publications. And the question as to whether or not to address Dessalines by this imperial title seems to have been an early source of contention in these early American reports. Newspapers such as New York’s *The Bee* were at first reluctant to call Dessalines by his newly adopted title, instead asserting that “the black general” had “performed the farce of being crowned emperor of Hayti”. Other newspapers also played on the supposedly farcical nature of the coronation of a “negro chief” or the “Chief of the Brigands of Hispaniola”. Reports such as these sought to undermine Dessalines by simultaneously asserting his race and denying him the imperial name. Other reports relied on racist ideology by attesting to the “absurdity” of a black imperial sovereign and by inviting readers to see it in a comical and farcical light. As one writer claimed: “When I first heard of the black chief of St. Domingo bestowing on himself the title of emperor of Hayti, I could not help smiling”. This same report depicted the coronation as an attempt to flatter Napoleon and France, insisting that the title was evidence of the desire of blacks everywhere to emulate their white ‘superiors’. As a result, Dessalines was effectively dismissed as “a specimen of that miserable and childish spirit of imitation, which some think characteristic of the negro race”.

Although reports such as these looked to mock the newly crowned emperor based on racist ideas of black leadership, Dessalines still found pockets of

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39 Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 106.
40 *The Bee*, 6 November 1804.
41 *Daily Advertiser*, 16 November 1804; *Columbian Repository*, 27 November 1804.
42 *Literary Magazine and American Register, for 1804, from April to December*, vol. 2 (1804), 655.
43 Ibid.
support within the American press. Such newspapers appeared to be acutely aware that this new title could be as damaging as his race to the already-contentious nature of Dessalines’s political legitimacy. Pro-mercantile commentators, in particular, appear to have viewed his adoption of the title of emperor as a potentially volatile and self-defeating act that would dampen American support even further. As a result, some reports sought to play down the significance of the title by asserting that the Haitian government, like the American government, was not hereditary.44 The question of Dessalines’s legitimacy as an imperial sovereign was also addressed in reports that asserted his status as the “legitimate Emperor of Hayti” and claimed his “title is equally as good as that of one of his brethren in Europe”.45 Some commentators even went so far as to claim that Dessalines and Haiti had a greater right to these titles as “their superiority to all black nations” was greater than France’s “pre-eminence above other European nations”.46

Other reports were framed within assertions of the supposed virtues of republicanism by depicting Dessalines as a kind of reluctant emperor and one who was far removed from the self-fulfilling ambitions normally associated with imperial nominations. Newspapers claimed that rather than adopt the title himself, with “that modesty which we suppose is inherent in great minds, he long held out” and that eventually “he yielded to the wishes of the people”.47 Other newspapers speculated that Dessalines’s coronation had been met with “probably more general acclamation” than had occurred in Paris for Napoleon’s coronation.48 While these kinds of reports accepted that the new title consolidated his powers, they also distanced Dessalines from suggestions that Haitian leadership was hereditary, instead claiming that Dessalines would nominate his successor. But perhaps more significantly, these same reports claimed that this successor would be “one who shed his blood for the interest of

44 The Balance and Columbian Repository, 23 July 1804.
45 Columbian Centinel, 24 November 1804.
46 Literary Magazine and American Register, for 1804, from April to December, vol. 2 (1804), 656.
47 The Balance and Columbian Repository, 16 October 1804.
48 Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser, 13 October 1804.
his country”, thereby pre-empting any criticism or accusations of nepotism to which the Haitian leader might be subjected.⁴⁹ Reports such as these ultimately sought to show that Dessalines was listening to and acting on his people’s wishes, thus playing to the American notion of the people’s role in sovereignty and the assertion by some that citizens should have an active say in governmental affairs.⁵⁰ In essence, even though Dessalines had adopted the title of emperor, he did so by adhering to the collective will of the people and therefore the legitimacy and viability of Haiti’s sovereignty was one that could still be defended.

Pro-trade supporters that defended or dismissed the significance of Dessalines’s imperial title were demonstrating an awareness of the more general discourses that debated political legitimacy and appropriate forms of government in America in the early 1800s—discourses in to which they did not want to see the Haitian emperor drawn. As Jenson observes, American newspapers noted that Dessalines’s coronation came within an “imperial year” and at a time when negative feeling towards the dynasties of Europe was on the rise. For a decade Europe had been plagued by war and the brief moment of peace offered by the Treaty of Amiens in 1803 had ended one year later. For many American observers, the imperial ambitions of European emperors and monarchs were the root cause of these conflicts and their devastating consequences for European citizens. In turn, the criticism aimed at European rulers served to further strengthen America’s political identity—advocated by Jefferson—as the “best government on earth” and its unique republican status in the face of both traditional and newly created European dynasties.⁵¹ For many Americans in the early nineteenth century, popular sovereignty was viewed as the “apotheosis of

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⁴⁹ The Spectator, 13 October 1804.
⁵⁰ Edmund Morgan argued persuasively that popular sovereignty in America was a “fiction” created to exert better governmental control in the post-revolutionary climate: Morgan, Inventing the People, 286-287.
⁵¹ Wood, Empire of Liberty, 286
modern governance” and therefore America’s national identity was increasingly dependent on the uniqueness of its republican form of governance.\(^{52}\)

The scorn with which Old World forms of governance were viewed in America in the early 1800s can be seen in the newspaper reports that derided them. In this period of time, American newspapers were concerned that Europe would be "overrun with Emperors and Empires” and that a “predilection for high-sounding titles” was becoming the norm among the Old World states.\(^{53}\) The adoption of these imperial titles was seen as a “precedent established by Buonaparte [sic]”, and Federalists and Democratic-Republicans seemed united in their denunciations of Europe’s post-revolutionary states and the adoption of such titles.\(^{54}\) Federalists lamented the destruction of traditional hierarchies and claimed that Jefferson was leading America down a similarly destructive path if he continued to ignore traditional modes and procedures of governance.\(^{55}\) One newspaper even mischievously claimed that in such an imperial year, “Thomas I of Fredonia might be next”.\(^{56}\) Democratic-Republicans, on the other hand, scorned Federalists for their perceived support of traditional dynastic forms of government and claimed that the Federalist “monarchical program” was “counter to the libertarian impulses of America’s republican ideology”.\(^{57}\)

Despite their different agendas, both sides of the American political spectrum looked to Europe’s emperors with derision and asserted America’s unique—and superior—mode of governance. It is within this context that receptions to Dessalines in America must be considered. Whereas negative depictions of the Haitian leader had at first focused on the massacres of whites or more generally on his ‘savage’ and ‘ferocious’ nature, Dessalines soon became situated within American derisions of the legitimacy and sovereignty of Europe’s new post-revolutionary states. In this climate, pro-trade supporters feared that if

\(^{52}\) Onuf, "Land of the Free," 195.  
\(^{53}\) True Republican, 31 October 1804.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid.  
\(^{55}\) Wilentz, American Democracy, 107.  
\(^{56}\) The Annals of the Times, 26 November 1804.  
\(^{57}\) Wood, Empire of Liberty, 276.
American observers found it difficult to offer support to a black leader, then support for one who had adopted a form of governance almost universally detested throughout America—and one that went against the principles of both major political parties—would be almost impossible. Such fears were soon realised. News of Dessalines’s coronation was confirmation for some newspapers that this “predilection” for imperial titles had extended to the West Indies, leading to the conclusion that “the disorder of Emperor-making seems to be contagious”.\textsuperscript{58} More specifically, a number of newspapers sought to frame Dessalines in denunciations of the actions of Napoleon and the other “tyrants” of Europe. As newspapers in this time asserted that “true republicans, are generally no great admirers of kings and emperors” then depictions of Emperor Dessalines became a source not only of derision for black political leadership but also as a contributor to the more general scorn for Old World forms of governance.\textsuperscript{59}

American reports—regardless of their political leanings—often aligned Dessalines with these newly made emperors of the Old World and sought to include him in denunciatory narratives aimed at the very concept of these new dynasties. For this reason, articles in America often referred to Dessalines by his imperial title until the end of his reign. While some headlines claimed a black emperor to be a shocking “spectacle”, other titles more generally made exclamations pointing to “Another Emperor” or the “New Emperors”.\textsuperscript{60} In this sense there was a general acceptance of Dessalines’s imperial title within the American press. However, this acceptance was not intended to translate to more respect for the Haitian leader. Rather, for newspapers such as the \textit{Daily Advertiser}, the coronation in Haiti was portrayed as being symptomatic and representative of a “rage for titles” being witnessed in France and other parts of Europe.\textsuperscript{61} Wording such as this that portrayed Haiti’s change to an imperial form of governance as following a trend ultimately sought to dismiss its legitimacy and in turn the legitimacy of Europe’s other self-constructed dynasties. As such,

\textsuperscript{58} Connecticut Herald, 18 December 1804.
\textsuperscript{59} The Farmer’s Cabinet, 15 July 1806.
\textsuperscript{60} Haverhill Observer, 4 September 1804; Philadelphia Gazette, 8 October 1804.
\textsuperscript{61} Daily Advertiser, 16 November 1804.
in attempting to gain public support from within America, the meaning invested in titles of governance was a damaging factor for Dessalines.

These kinds of reports wanted to ensure the Haitian emperor and the new emperors of Europe were aligned in their political ideologies, and the idea of a kind of ideological fraternity among these sovereigns was key to such depictions. One article that appeared in a number of American newspapers, but which was originally from the widely read Poulson’s Daily American Advertiser, was an imagined proclamation from the Haitian leader. By the time of Dessalines’s coronation, American newspapers were well accustomed to the numerous proclamations and decrees that Dessalines had authored—proclamations that were circulated widely among American news sources. As Jenson has demonstrated, these proclamations were designed to create a “Haitian political identity and agency that would resonate on the world stage”. Even though these decrees clearly called on Haitian citizens to forever renounce France, the Advertiser’s ‘proclamation’ claimed to be addressed to “Brother Napoleon” from his “best brother”, Dessalines. This proclamation also made reference to Dessalines’s “Cousin Talleyrand” and his “Nephew of Spain”. Reports in other publications wondered whether Napoleon’s fondness of “uniting his relations in marriage to great families” would result in the marital union of one of his relatives with one of Dessalines’s daughters. The idea that these Old and New World—white and black—empires were related was constructed as a way for early American commentators to call into question the legitimacy of these new imperial forms of government. In essence, Haiti, France and the other new dynasties of Europe were equal in their illegitimacy, and each served to undermine the other’s call for sovereign and respectful recognition. In this way, such reports denied Dessalines’s claims for a unique political identity for the new Haitian state by positioning him—and in turn the Haitian state as a whole—as a member of the increasingly despotic family of nations of the Old World.

62 Jenson, "Dessalines’s American Proclamations," 76.
63 The Telegraphe and Daily Advertiser, 6 August 1804.
64 New England Palladium, 29 July 1806.
The idea that Dessalines himself looked up to Napoleon as a political older sibling—and the value that this held for American observers as a means by which the emperors of Haiti and France could be attacked—is best exemplified by a mock poem that appeared in Joseph Dennie’s widely-read periodical, *The Portfolio*. Born in Boston to a wealthy merchant family in 1768, Dennie contributed to a number of Federalist-friendly journals before establishing *The Portfolio* at the turn of the nineteenth century. Dennie was a supporter of the Federalists and a fierce opponent of Jefferson’s brand of politics. Described by one historian as a “reluctant exile” from Britain, Dennie saw Jeffersonian democracy as a viable threat to the destruction of traditional hierarchies that he saw as essential to the security and prosperity of nations everywhere—most significantly for early America.\(^\text{65}\) *The Portfolio* was thus used to get this message across with a mixture of newspaper reports and original literature. In an edition published in March 1805, Dennie included a poem said to have been found on a French ship seized in the West Indies titled, “An Heroic Epistle from JAQUES I, Emperor of Hayti, To NAPOLEON I, Emperor of the French”. Much like the imagined proclamation that appeared in the *Poulson Advertiser*, the epistle sought to frame Dessalines in an alternative light to the anti-French and anti-colonial rhetoric of his own proclamations. As in the *Poulson Advertiser*, Dessalines sent “greeting to our brother / For one great Emperor should greet another” and the poem drew parallels between the two emperors, who were said to be “Alike in fortune, alike in fame”. The poem framed Napoleon and Dessalines together in their past actions as Dessalines “observed” that “No ancient, or no modern name can shine / In acts of blood, compar’d with yours and mine”.\(^\text{66}\)

The suggestion that Dessalines’s cruelty was in imitation of the example set by his supposed idol was used by other reports at the time which claimed that “[t]he Emperor of Hayti exercises the most despotic government, like his great


\(^{\text{66}}\) *The Portfolio*, 2 March 1805.
prototype in France”. In doing so, reports such as these were able to suggest that any past atrocities committed in Haiti—and indeed the tyranny that continued—were less to do with Dessalines himself and more a consequence of the reckless and inhumane example set by Napoleon. In the Heroic Epistle, the anonymous author drew these comparisons to highlight that Napoleon had in fact exceeded his “brother” emperor in acts of tyranny in a damning indictment of the French ruler. Napoleon was shown to far outdo his Haitian counterpart in dishonour for the betrayal of those who once claimed to fight for the French leader, including the by-now infamous Toussaint and Jean-Charles Pichegru—celebrated figures whose only crime was that they had “dared to dispute your right to reign”. Unlike Napoleon, Dessalines declared: “Revenge is sweet; but e’en to gain my ends / I can’t betray my patrons, kill my friends”. The poem alluded to Dessalines’s massacres and supposed atrocities during the Revolution but appeared to offer a defence by claiming that these were logical actions of one subjected to slavery. Although the poem was far from a celebration of Dessalines, the clear suggestion was that the Haitian emperor’s crimes paled in significance compared to those of Napoleon.

The poem was an opportunity for Dennie to show—through the examples of Dessalines and Napoleon—the danger of post-revolutionary empires and the capitulation of traditional hierarchies that they represented. For Dennie, this destruction of traditional order was seen to lead to the kind of corruption of power that could occur when figures such as Dessalines and Napoleon ruled nations. Although the poem alluded to the French emperor having committed the greater atrocities to date, it ended with a suggestion that Napoleon’s thirst for expansion would be abetted by his Haitian imperial sibling. Dessalines was shown to encourage the French ruler to “be greater still / Make all things stoop to your imperial will”. The emperors were depicted as an affront to true

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67 New York Commercial Advertiser, 18 October 1806.
68 Pichegru was a French military commander who was found guilty of a conspiracy to overthrow Napoleon near the end of 1803. He died while in prison, reportedly by committing suicide: Steven Englund, Napoleon: A Political Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 225-234.
republican principles as they were shown to be willing to sacrifice whatever and whoever it took to achieve their own ambition and that even “Low in the dust proud Freedom shall be hurl’d / Whilst you and I divide the conquer’d world”. Jeffersonian policy was criticised as the poem claimed it was Britain—not America—that “bars us from unbounded power”, leading Dessalines to call on Napoleon to “Sink the proud isle! Or your imperial crown / Will totter on your head, and tumble down”. It should be no surprise that Dennie, a self-proclaimed Anglophile, would look to Britain as the potential saviour from the perceived combined threat of Dessalines and Napoleon. But more than this, Britain represented a form of stable governance based on traditional hierarchy—something that united Federalists and drove Dennie’s writing.69

Linda Kerber has argued that Napoleon was proof for American Federalists that democracy tended to “degenerate into despotism” and Dennie’s treatment of Dessalines served a similar purpose.70 In this respect, Dennie’s denunciation of Dessalines was not entirely based on the threat that a black political leader posed. Rather, it was used to propagate Federalist arguments in favour of a republican form of governance that rested on the concept of traditional hierarchy. Dessalines’s despotism—along with Napoleon’s—served as a stark warning of what could happen if non-traditional leaders were allowed into governmental power. The writing of Dennie demonstrates a counter-revolutionary response to Haiti’s newly found independence and suggests that denials of Haiti’s political legitimacy were sometimes founded on American Federalist calls for the support of traditional forms of political leadership. As Kerber further notes, Federalists such as Dennie insisted that “Americans interpret the French Revolution as a cautionary tale” because democracy “was never static; constant vigilance was required to keep popular government stable”.71 Rachel Cleves has furthered this argument by demonstrating how the Federalist rhetoric of anti-Jacobinism—formed in America during the French Revolution—continued to play a central role in American discourses throughout

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69 Kaplan, Men of Letters, 141-151.
70 Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 197.
71 Ibid., 199.
the early nineteenth century which were used by American conservatives to “suppress democratic challenges” to traditional hierarchies and to perpetuate a fear of democratic violence. Dennie’s portrayal of the power-hungry, despotic Dessalines meant that Haitian independence was appropriated as a similar warning for American audiences and reinforced the need for traditional forms of leadership within the American government, otherwise America would risk ‘degenerating’ into the chaos of post-revolutionary states such as Haiti. In this way Dessalines became central to discussions not only of the legitimacy of black political sovereignty but of the illegitimacy of post-revolutionary governments (with the exception of America) more generally.

The way that American observers approached Dessalines’s self-proclaimed emperorship can also be perceived as a means to silence the political agency of Haiti’s revolutionary leader. Jenson has claimed that the formation of the Haitian Empire “would largely cover the historical traces of Dessalines’ early theorizations of national independence”. Jenson’s work has highlighted that the numerous proclamations made by Dessalines—which were published in America—were the product of “the firebrand voice of a new national identity echoing purposefully throughout the Americas”, but this aspect of Dessalines’s legacy would be lost in narratives of the Haitian empire by Western historians of Haiti from the nineteenth century onwards. But the ‘forgetting’ of Dessalines’s political origins in favour of stressing his imperial designs was clearly a tactic that was also employed by contemporary commentators. The emphasis on Emperor Dessalines—and an ideological alignment with his ‘brother’ Napoleon—was deployed by American commentators at the time to transform his political significance as an anti-colonial, independence-fighting “firebrand” to that of an autocratic, power-hungry, vain, aspiring monarch. Even the Poulson Advertiser’s fake proclamation subverted the anti-colonial—and specifically anti-French—message of Dessalines’s early proclamations by re-imagining Dessalines

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73 Jenson, “Dessalines’s American Proclamations,” 93.
as an imperial mimic, and one who desperately wanted friendly communications with Napoleon and France. Thus, Dessalines’s political significance was reduced by his desire to be “elevated” to the same status as the backward and non-progressive European dynasties.

This narrative of Dessalines, in turn, presented a more uncomplicated solution to the paradox he presented to American observers. Haiti and Dessalines—like America—had defeated their colonial masters to establish their own independence and Dessalines represented another revolutionary, anti-colonial figurehead in the Americas. But if early America’s political identity was largely reliant on its status as the first post-colonial republic in the Western hemisphere, Haiti’s republican status challenged the notion of this uniqueness. By aligning the ‘tyrannical’ Emperor Dessalines with Napoleon and the other new European dynasties—and by calling into question the legitimacy of these new empires—American commentators were able to assert more forcefully the superiority of America’s form of liberal governance. If Americans in the early 1800s began to question if there was “a difference between aristocracy and leadership” then Emperor Dessalines—along with his ‘brother’ emperors in Europe—enabled American commentators to show to the American public this distinction more clearly and, crucially, one that allowed America to assert its exceptional approach to political leadership. The formation of the Haitian empire meant that Dessalines could be more easily dismissed as another example of the corrupting nature of power and the lust for self-ambition that seemed to be so evident in countries other than America. The Haitian leader therefore became further proof for American commentators of the incompatibility of republican ideologies and imperial titles. By emphasising Dessalines’s emperor status and forgetting his revolutionary, republican past, American commentators could continue to more easily perpetuate the idea that America was the only truly free and democratic republic in a world of despotic dynastic forms of government.

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74 Morgan, *Inventing the People*, 287.
This denunciation of Dessalines was something that both major political parties in America could support. If Federalists in the early nineteenth century maintained a belief that ‘ordinary’ people had no right to contribute to the governance of a nation and instead relied on more traditional forms of power and leadership, then Dessalines—the black, ex-slave—represented the ultimate rejection of traditional governance and the disastrous consequences this could have on a nation. But at the same time, if Democratic-Republicans opposed “traditional monarchies…with their bloated executives and standing armies” and had effectively sustained an attack on the concept of “monocracy”, Dessalines’s imperial nomination asked for him to be positioned alongside these dynastic leaders. The ideological paradox that Dessalines’s title created—that of an ex-slave, anti-colonial, post-revolutionary imperial sovereign—ultimately worked against him from both sides of the American political spectrum. In this way, assertions of Dessalines’s imperial title served to both diminish his and Haiti’s significance as a political voice in the Americas, while also reasserting American perceptions of superiority and their ‘unique’ form of republicanism in an Atlantic world caught up in a “rage for titles” and autocratic rule.

**British Reactions to the Emperor of Haiti**

In Britain, as in America, early reactions to the new Haitian state and Dessalines were soon framed by reports of the 1804 massacres. A number of these depictions contributed to continuing anti-Jacobin rhetoric in loyalist British publications by reminding readers of the September Massacres of 1792 in France. These reports were an attempt not only to provoke a fear of black Jacobinism but to remind British audiences of the threat of Jacobinism more generally. Newspapers reported on the scale of the genocide as they claimed that immediately after Dessalines’s orders were known “between five or six hundred persons fell under the bloody hatchet of the Haytians” in one town alone. A common claim in these reports was that cannibalism was a central feature during the massacres. Rachel Cleves has argued that the concept of cannibalism

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was a significant contributor to assertions of English morality towards violence from the seventeenth century. Even more pertinently, Cleves notes that in anti-Jacobin discourses which attacked the French Revolution writers “turned again and again to imagery of cannibalism to reveal the violence that resulted from each Jacobin evil”.76 Allusions to cannibalism during the 1804 massacres in Haiti thus contributed to an anti-Jacobin rhetoric that had gained new momentum following Britain’s renewal of war with France. Second-hand accounts of Haiti were circulated that described how “cannibals vied with each other...for the honour of striking the first blow” as white colonists were routinely decapitated in broad daylight.77 The inhumane nature of the killings was made explicit as reports claimed that “the warm stream of blood which ran...quenched the thirst of their murderers who went on their knees to receive it” and that women and children had been massacred in “one common ruin...the infant sucking at the breast and the unoffending mother from whom it derived its nourishment”.78 Claims such as these that pointed to the suffering of women and children were a particularly common theme as reports espoused indignation that mothers were forced to watch “the shocking spectacle of [their] murdered daughters, weltering in their blood”.79 In this way the Haitian massacres were situated in a more general and continuing counter-revolutionary discourse in Britain in the early nineteenth century. From the very beginning of Haitian independence, therefore, the infant state was susceptible to British criticisms of post-revolutionary political entities more generally.

As a result, a significant proportion of British observers—particularly pro-slavery figures—criticised calls for respectful dealings with the newly independent black state. When news of Dessalines’s massacres arrived this “further alienated British opinion”. As David Geggus elaborates, supporters of the

76 Cleves, “”Jacobins in this Country”, " 434.
77 Caledonian Mercury, 6 September 1804.
78 Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register, 28 July 1804; Chester Chronicle, 27 July 1804.
79 Hull Packet, 11 September 1804.
slave trade in particular “made great capital out of the massacres”. If stories of black violence and ‘savagery’ during the Haitian Revolution were countered with examples of French atrocities, Haitian supporters this time had little to offer in response. The killing of thousands of white Europeans in the Caribbean—so close to Britain’s own colonies and citizens—made overt support for Dessalines almost impossible to declare publicly and the lack of positive depictions of Dessalines from within Britain certainly seems to support this claim. Although anti-French sentiment was at a peak in Britain at this time, any notion of support or praise for the deaths of white colonists at the hands of black revolutionaries was evidently too radical for even the staunchest anti-French enthusiast.

More significantly, British abolitionists—who had hitherto been lukewarm at best towards Dessalines—now almost completely turned their backs on him despite the key role the Revolution had played in their debates only a couple of years previously. As a nation, Haiti still elicited support among some British abolitionists. Prominent figures such as William Wilberforce expressed annoyance that anti-Haiti reports failed to see the brutality Dessalines himself had suffered and were anxious of the damage that these depictions of Dessalines could cause to their campaign. James Stephen’s 1804 publication The Opportunity echoed Wilberforce by claiming that Dessalines’s reputation had been deliberately tarnished by supporters of the slave trade, while also calling on the British government to assist Haiti in securing its independence. Stephen even alluded briefly in footnotes to the “moderation” and “humanity” of Dessalines during the Revolution. Stephen’s text failed to offer anything more substantial in terms of support for Haiti’s first post-independence leader, however. In fact, Stephen likened Dessalines to the warring Roman king Hostillius and framed him as a “most unworthy successor of the humane

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81 Ibid., 144.
83 Stephen, The Opportunity, 120-121.
It is apparent that in the wake of the massacres, British abolitionists were reluctant or felt unable to stem the tide of negative press towards the Haitian leader and this resulted in a damaging blow to British perceptions of Haiti so early on in Dessalines’s reign. In almost all these reports, the architect of the massacres against the French was ignored or silenced. Instead, abolitionist supporters focused on ‘remembering’ the moderate and humane Toussaint, referring more abstractedly to the obstacles faced by the Haitians and the ‘progress’ they had made in such challenging circumstances. In doing so, British supporters of abolitionism sought to supplant Haiti’s violent present with memories of its heroism and its capacity to advance—both exemplified by the universally admired Toussaint.

David Geggus has noted how—with the exception of the writing that appeared after Toussaint’s death—Haiti received surprisingly little attention from British literary figures in the early years of its independence. Certainly in literary texts, support for Dessalines was almost completely absent. Unlike the venerated Toussaint, who had inspired biographies and poetry, Dessalines’s divisiveness meant that he was almost completely ignored in British literature. However, a notable exception to this silence that is often overlooked is a brief but telling passage found towards the end of Marcus Rainsford’s Historical Account. In it, Rainsford offered a more positive depiction of Dessalines than could be found in British writing on Haiti in the early 1800s—and as exemplified by texts such as Stephen’s The Opportunity—as he looked optimistically to the future of the Haitian state. In the concluding pages of his text, Rainsford reflected on Dessalines’s role in the Revolution and the formation of the Haitian state in a more positive light than was the norm in Britain at the time. The “brave Dessalines” was remembered during the Revolution as an astute and determined military officer who had “resolved vigorously to push the war to a

84 Ibid., 47; 126.
85 In addition to the 1804 publication of Stephen’s The Opportunity, a number of writers sympathetic to the abolitionist cause published texts that eulogised Toussaint. See Marcus Wood, Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229-235.
This was consistent with portrayals of Dessalines in Britain as, despite their negative and largely racist outlook, most sources at least accepted Dessalines’s supposed bravery and success on the battlefield during the Revolution. However, where Rainsford offered a more unique portrayal of the Haitian leader to other sources was in the assertions of Dessalines’s attempts to have worked for the betterment of the island and to “combine the people more closely”. Central to this admiration was the “pristine simplicity” of Dessalines’s government that Rainsford claimed was comparable with the “simplicity of the earliest institutions”.

Rainsford’s praise for Dessalines was brief and far from all encompassing. However, the snippets offered were a point of departure from the monster depicted in British reports at the time—a depiction that Rainsford would observe as severely impeding any chance of success for the fledgling black state. Exactly how successful Rainsford wanted Haiti to be is unclear from his writing but his portrayal of Dessalines—at a time of extremely negative reports on the Haitian leader in Britain—suggests that he harboured hopes of a continuation of the “experiment” of a black republic in the New World and that he wanted to see it thrive as an independent state “unmolested by European powers”. He clearly saw in Haiti a new kind of political nation, one which was not shackled by the ideas and limitations of “ancient states” and one that was operating under new, unique conditions. The perceived simplicity of its government was viewed as a refreshing alternative to the corrupt and class-restrictive nature of Old World governments and, by portraying its leader in a more positive light, Rainsford attempted to offer a more positive outlook for the Haitian state—one that looked excitedly to its potential as a political agent in a changing Atlantic world.

Although defences such as Rainsford’s were few and far between in British publications throughout Dessalines’s reign and beyond his death, another

88 Ibid., 355.
89 Ibid., 348, 356.
90 Ibid., 360.
notable exception is John Aikin’s obituary of Dessalines in 1807. Aikin was a physician and writer who worked for a while as an editor for publications such as *The Athenaeum*. Aikin’s writing spanned multiple themes and issues, from memoirs of medical practitioners to children’s books.91 After Dessalines’s death, Aikin looked to defend the memory of Haiti’s first leader in the first volume of *The Athenaeum*’s 1807 edition. In it Aikin asserted that Dessalines deserved to be classed “with those characters [of] the extraordinary and eventful revolutions of modern times”. Aikin asked his readers to remember that during the Revolution Dessalines had conducted himself with “great skill and intrepidity”.92 However, more significant than this was how Dessalines’s political leadership was legitimised. The obituary remembered the “patriotic chief” who had delivered his country from “the most horrid tyranny” and who had subsequently looked to provide for its “future security, independence and happiness”. Aikin remembered an assiduous political leader who planned for the “internal regulation and government” of the new nation.93 Aikin asserted the “popularity” of Dessalines among Haitians and highlighted the “inconsistency and contradiction” of accounts that had detailed Dessalines’s apparent crimes since his death. Part of the defence of the Haitian leader against these accusations was that Dessalines’s popularity had possibly been too great as this “excites envy, and envy hatred”. Most remarkably of all, Aikin’s obituary ended by outlining the “lenient and humane” Dessalines. The 1804 massacres were not mentioned and in their place Aikin painted the portrait of a leader who had displayed “common forbearance” under circumstances that, for lesser men, would “steel the heart and...render it callous to every tender and sympathetic emotion”.94 Such writing suggests that although defences of Dessalines were uncommon in Britain, there were some voices willing to speak in favour of the Haitian head of state.

93 Ibid., 190.
94 Ibid., 191.
Aikin’s obituary was notable not only for the way in which it sought to defend
the character of Dessalines but also his legitimacy as a political agent—a figure
that had not only fought valiantly in the Revolution but one who had also done
what he could to secure Haiti’s political footing as a sovereign nation. Although
such defences as these were undoubtedly rare in British newspapers while he
was alive, there is evidence that some publications were similarly willing to
assert the legitimacy of Haiti’s first leader. One newspaper report in July 1804
claimed that Dessalines had assumed for Haiti “the style and dignity of an
independent and equal state, and [he] issues his orders with all the solemnity of
a regular and established government”—a very different picture to the disorder
and chaos of Haiti presented in so many other reports of the time. The same
report also asserted the “superiority” of Dessalines’s education, when compared
with that of some of the other leaders of the Revolution—again, an unlikely
counter to the depictions of Dessalines as an uncivilised and murderous brute.
Other reports referred to a decree made by Dessalines that he would pay
repatriation costs of forty dollars for every native Haitian that had migrated to
America during the Revolution, describing it as an act originating from the
“genuine and blended principles of policy and humanity”. Reports such as these
sought to counter reports of Dessalines as irrationally violent and
uncontrollable, and instead tried to paint a picture of a dignified political leader.

Exactly why newspapers such as these attempted to counter the negative
depictions of Dessalines in Britain is unclear. However, the portrayal of an
educated, civilised and prudent political leader would have certainly helped the
cause of those in Britain who wished to see trade agreements between Britain
and the Haitian state formally ratified. As historians have pointed out, behind
closed doors British politicians initially advocated the need to secure favourable
trade agreements with Haiti and to guarantee its independence—largely as a

95 Trewman’s Flying Post, 12 July 1804.
96 Derby Mercury, 10 May 1804.
strategy to weaken the economic strength of both France and America. And even after news of the massacres emerged, the killings were sidelined in British political discourses as hopes of securing trade agreements with the fledgling republic remained alive. In private correspondence, at least, some British colonial officials and politicians seemed willing to ignore the massacres in their attempts to secure commercial prosperity for Britain in the Caribbean. Therefore, newspaper reports that asserted the legitimacy of Haiti’s government and Dessalines’s leadership were in turn asserting the legitimacy of the Haitian state as a potentially lucrative trading partner.

In addition to these kinds of reports, other newspapers underlined the successes of Haitian independence as a potentially useful contribution to the anti-French discourses that were dominating the British press at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As Linda Colley’s work has highlighted, the Francophobia of British loyalists was explicit from the eighteenth century but this was solidified even further with the resumption of war between Britain and France in 1803. In this context, reports of Dessalines’s hatred of France—and reminders of Haiti’s continuing independence from their former colonial power—served to strengthen and universalise the anti-French perspectives of British loyalists. The Derby Mercury remarked on an early proclamation from Haiti and noted that its “principal features are eternal hatred to Frenchmen and the French name”. Other reports emphasised that Dessalines and his generals “have all sworn to resist forever the authority of France, and to die rather than live under its dominion”. But these depictions also attempted to remove a perceived threat of Haiti—a threat that was felt throughout the Caribbean as colonists feared an exportation of the Revolution—by insisting that Dessalines’s anti-colonial stance was reserved exclusively for the French. As if to quell fears of the spread of the Haitian Revolution, the proclamation was seen as proof that “all ideas of

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98 Girard, "Dessalines and the Atlantic System," 574; Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 83-85.
100 Colley, Britons, 303-313.
101 Derby Mercury, 10 May 1804.
conquest and aggrandisement” were absent from the Haitian government’s plans. Some reports even attempted to anglicise the Haitian leader as “John James Dessalines” in their efforts to promote the Haitian leader as a prominent anti-French and potentially pro-British ally.102

As in America, news of Dessalines’s change of title reached Britain in the later months of 1804. And, as with publications across the Atlantic, Dessalines’s coronation appears to have finally eradicated any remnants of support for the Haitian leader within British newspapers. It is important to note that some of Dessalines’s supporters did attempt to defend the new Haitian emperor’s imperial title. Writing against the idea that Dessalines was some kind of self-appointed oligarch, Marcus Rainsford stressed that he had been “unanimously appointed” by the people of Haiti. Rainsford defended Dessalines’s choice of title by claiming that “the Imperial dignity was the reward for the courage and experience of the Chief”.103 Similarly, Aikin’s obituary also addressed the issue of the imperial title by claiming that this was “invested” in him rather than a title he chose himself.104 Rainsford enthused over Dessalines’s coronation by claiming that it painted a “grand and impressive picture”.105 However, although there is evidence of some newspapers defending Dessalines’s title by similarly asserting that it had been thrust upon him by the will of the people and that the title was a reasonable way to assert Haiti’s independence from France, in general such defences were uncommon.106

Instead, depictions of the new emperor’s coronation sometimes played on stereotypically racist ideology as the event was described as a moment of barbarity and ridicule. Reports taken from American newspapers were circulated among British publications and attested to the “spectacle” of the “creation of an Emperor”. Such reports claimed that the Emperor of Haiti was as

102 Caledonian Mercury, 24 May 1804.
103 Rainsford, Historical Account, 359.
104 Aikin, ”Jean Jaques Dessalines,” 191.
105 Rainsford, Historical Account, 356.
106 See for example Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle, 26 November 1804.
“ugly, as ill-shaped and as disgusting a little black fellow as I ever beheld on any of the plantations of Virginia or South Carolina”. Depictions such as these not only sought to delegitimise the “jet black” Dessalines as a political ruler but they ultimately served to also completely deride the whole notion of a black imperial court. Dessalines’s aides, including Christophe, were described as “swaggering fellows” who had little “mental faculties” and were not “overburdened with sense”. Instead, these reports claimed, “painted Europeans” worked in the background to advise and guide the new Haitian empire. These narratives also reinforced racist discourses by claiming that the Haitian public who attended the ceremony were completely naked and “flew like madmen” when called to attend the ceremony by gunfire. This “mob” of Haitians was depicted as celebrating the coronation in a state of noisy, naked frenzy that served to underline the notion of their black ‘savagery’ and lack of civilised refinement.107

Despite these racialised discourses, however, a number of British depictions of Dessalines’s coronation largely omitted such overtly racist rhetoric from their writing. Instead, it seems that a significant number of publications were more concerned with the fact that a New World emperor had emerged at the same time that the much-maligned Napoleon had adopted the imperial title. The timing of Dessalines’s decision to adopt the same title as Napoleon was emphasised in British newspapers which suggested that the Haitian leader, despite his anti-French pretensions, had changed his title of rule in imitation of the newly-crowned French emperor. Newspapers reported on the “farce” of the Haitian coronation “as seen in France” and at times referred to Dessalines as “Jaques I” in order to align the Haitian emperor with his French idol, the newly-crowned “Napoleon I”.108 Reports such as these ignored, or perhaps were unaware, that Dessalines’s coronation had in fact occurred in October 1804—some two months before Napoleon’s coronation in France (although Dessalines’s proclaimed intention to adopt the title had come some months after Napoleon’s

107 This report was circulated among a number of newspapers. See for example: Caledonian Mercury, 7 January 1805; Aberdeen Journal 16 January 1805.
108 Northampton Mercury, 24 November 1804; Aberdeen Journal, 16 January 1805
imperial nomination in May 1804). Regardless, newspapers such as the *Northampton Mercury* published reports via American sources that went so far as to suggest that Dessalines was planning to create a cardinal from his own family to sanctify his coronation. According to this report Pope Pius VII was “too fatigued” to make Dessalines’s coronation—most likely an allusion to the fact that Pius had made the journey to attend and sanctify Napoleon’s coronation. Pope Pius VII’s attendance at Napoleon’s coronation was derided by British satirists who depicted the pope as someone who was coerced into attending out of fear of the despotic Napoleon. Therefore, the idea that Dessalines would simply create a cardinal in order to replicate this part of the coronation ceremony—and to further legitimise his title—was invented by the *Mercury* to underline the ‘absurdity’ of Dessalines’s mimicry and to call into question the legitimacy of this process of the self-coronation of post-revolutionary imperial rulers.

By depicting Dessalines’s title as an attempt to mimic that of Napoleon’s, British commentators were able to dismiss the political agency of the Haitian head of state. Just as in America, observers looked to ‘recontextualise’ Dessalines not as an anti-French figurehead in the Caribbean but as one who in fact looked to imitate French forms of political leadership in the ultimate display of flattery. In fact, even prior to his self-nomination, some reports had already sought to align Dessalines with his European “brother”. It was said that Dessalines’s “greatest ambition is to ape the supposed policy of Bonaparte” and he soon earned the title “The Bonaparte of the New World”. This recontextualisation also extended to Dessalines’s self-constructed status as the anti-colonial avenger of the Americas. Rather, such reports claimed that Dessalines looked to expand his new empire and often drew parallels between the two leaders’ perceived “objects of ambition”, claiming that while “one has gained the complete and indisputable ascendancy over the Continent of Europe; the other pants for the same

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110 *Chester Chronicle*, 19 October 1804.
ascendancy over the West Indies”. When news reached the British press that Dessalines had decided to nominate himself as emperor and to declare the Haitian state an empire—only months after Napoleon had done the same—the view that Dessalines sought to be “as absolute as his brother Emperor, Bonaparte, is in France” was cemented in British imaginations.

Portraying Dessalines as a mimic Napoleon served to undermine the political agency of Haiti’s first head of state, but the question of which emperor came first was a central concern in some British reports. As Deborah Jenson has demonstrated, although news of Dessalines’s nomination did not reach the American press until early October of 1804—a number of months after Napoleon had been nominated the title of emperor—Haitian documents backdated the Haitian nomination as occurring in January or February of the same year in order to defend the Haitian emperor from charges of mimicry. Whether newspapers bought this attempt to backdate the nomination is unclear. Nevertheless, Dessalines was officially crowned in October 1804—two months before Napoleon’s coronation would finally take place. British newspapers such as the Aberdeen Journal seized on this timing and delighted in suggesting that Dessalines might “take precedence” of Napoleon in the “Sovereigns of the World”. Such reports wondered, quite logically, whether Dessalines had “precipitated his coronation” so that “in the catalogue of Emperors in the world” Dessalines would rank higher than the French emperor. These depictions argued that Napoleon’s emperor status was not confirmed until his coronation and that Dessalines was therefore an “older Emperor than the Corsican”. Such assertions contributed to British anti-Napoleon narratives by calling into question which emperor was in fact the one to be accused of mimicry.

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111 Caledonian Mercury, 9 July 1804.
112 Caledonian Mercury, 20 December 1804.
113 Jenson, Beyond the Slave Narrative, 103-106.
114 Aberdeen Journal, 28 November 1804.
115 Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury, 23 November 1804.
116 Manchester Mercury and Harrop’s General Advertiser, 20 November 1804.
In this way depictions of Dessalines became entangled in British discourses of political and imperial legitimacy—narratives that were constructed to deride self-appointed dynasties and that in turn served to underline the superiority of Britain’s traditional hereditary monarchy. However, while newspapers such as the Aberdeen Journal enthusiastically reported that Dessalines had overtaken Napoleon in the race to become emperor, other loyalist observers were not as positive in their interpretation of events. Stuart Semmel has noted how British loyalists saw Napoleon’s imperial nomination as “cheapening the currency of dynasty by mimicking its forms”. If British loyalist reactions to Napoleon’s imperial nomination resulted in the belief that “the health of Britain’s monarchy was endangered by the planting of new royal trees on the continent” then British reactions to another imperial coronation across the Atlantic must be viewed in a similar light. Newspapers such as the Morning Post saw both coronations as an affront to the tradition and legitimacy of imperial forms of government, and commented that Dessalines “seems no more aware than Emperor Nap, that he is bringing the Imperial dignity to a jakes”. The play on words and association between the first name of Haiti’s emperor—Jaques—and a jakes (a colloquial term for a toilet) was clearly intended as a rebuke of the Haitian emperor. But more significantly for newspapers such as this, both self-coronations ultimately served to tarnish the very concept of imperial titles and should therefore be derided.

Historians have noted that British loyalists undermined Napoleon’s legitimacy by reminding British audiences that the French emperor had not been born into the role. Consequently, as Semmel has argued: “The introduction of ‘legitimacy’ into British political discourse seems to have been directly connected to the peculiar case of Napoleon” and that this became necessary because of his “superficial similarity” to other kings—and, most importantly, the British

117 Semmel, Napoleon and the British, 109.
118 Ibid., 108.
119 Morning Post, 18 December 1804.
120 Moores, Representations of France, 88.
monarchy. With the nomination of a black emperor at the same time as the emergence of Europe’s new imperial sovereigns, some British writers saw a unique opportunity to use discussions of Dessalines that would serve British interests to a much greater extent than just supporting racist ideology. By aligning the nomination of a black, ex-slave emperor with that of the “Corsican upstart”, British loyalists could more easily highlight the supposedly absurd and illegitimate nature of the imperial claims of the newly crowned French emperor. Likewise, in the process British observers were able to equally dismiss any notion of legitimacy in Dessalines’s title. In this way, both Napoleon’s and Dessalines’s forms of government were presented as equal in their illegitimacy and therefore each served to undermine the other’s claim of sovereign rule.

Two texts published at the beginning of 1806 particularly sought to emphasise similarities between Napoleon and Dessalines in their attempts to denounce both the French and Haitian empires, while simultaneously asserting Britain’s superior form of traditional and legitimate governance. Founded in 1797, The Spirit of the Public Journals was an annual collection of essays, newspaper articles and other texts from numerous sources that were edited and published by Stephen Jones until 1814. Although details of Jones’s political leanings are hard to ascertain, it appears that Jones was a freemason. As Linda Colley has observed, masonic lodges in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries tended to be “prominent and sometimes dominant in provincial royal celebrations” and Jones’s editing of the Spirit certainly appeared to adhere to the loyalist sentiments of the masons by depicting the rise of self-proclaimed dynasties with utter contempt. The publisher of the Spirit was James Ridgway, a veteran radical who was said to be “at the center of radical booksellers

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121 Semmel, Napoleon and the British, 111.
publishing efforts in Newgate” in the 1790s.124 Ridgway was sentenced to four years in Newgate prison in 1793 for publishing works by Thomas Paine. Despite being an early and very vocal supporter of the French Revolution, by the beginning of the nineteenth century Ridgway had become a “respectable Piccadilly publisher-bookseller”.125 While the Spirit’s reporting of the Haitian leader lacked any empathy for his revolutionary successes, it nonetheless sought to denounce the self-proclaimed emperor of the post-revolutionary state.

The 1806 edition (being a collection of reports from 1805) contained a depiction of Dessalines’s coronation as originally printed in the Morning Post. The report claimed to be a first-hand account of the coronation and consisted of the kind of racially-motivated language found in other reports of the time that served to both mock the newly appointed Haitian emperor and to deny the Haitian state any legitimacy or importance. In the account, Dessalines was parodied as an exotic African chief who attempted, but failed, to mimic the Western imperial mode. The “Supreme Obeahman” was depicted as sitting “upon a pile of empty hogsheads” with a “wooden sceptre” as he surrounded himself with “his three favourite Empresses” who were “squatted at the foot of the Imperial throne”. Although this kind of rhetoric undoubtedly both caricatured Dessalines’s blackness and denied his agency as a respectable leader of a sovereign nation, the article also emphasised more generally the pomp and ceremony attached with such ceremonies. This was largely achieved by mocking the notion of titles and dignitaries handed out by self-proclaimed emperors; in this case to the “Imperial Pipe-bearer”, the “Imperial Mule-driver” and the “Chief Pot-boiler”.126 The distribution of titles of kingship and nobility to anyone in favour of the Emperor—regardless of the value of their claims to such a title—was also a common point of attack on Napoleon by British satirists. Printers such as James Gillray portrayed the French emperor as creating imperial titles at will.

125 Ibid., 164-165.
throughout Europe without any regard to traditional claims of such nobility. Gillray’s 1806 print *Tiddy-doll, the great French-gingerbread-baker; drawing out a new batch of kings*, exemplifies both the scorn for these newly created titles and the ease with which British loyalists believed that they could be created.\(^{127}\)

Therefore, with reports of Dessalines similarly distributing imperial titles among his court, it is possible to see how British commentators adopted the same kind of approaches to denounce Dessalines’s legitimacy as they did in their attacks on the French emperor.

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\(^{127}\) For more on this print and the manner in which it derided the ‘legitimacy’ of Napoleon’s emperorship, see Semmel, *Napoleon and the British*, 107-108.
his observations a request that it be printed alongside reports of Napoleon's coronation as “a comparison will display the magnificence of each more distinctly and manifestly”. However, he also asked that this be done “without injury to the account of the rival Coronation”. Undoubtedly the author was being mischievously sarcastic here and Jones also saw the value of aligning reports of the two emperors together. Immediately prior to the account of Dessalines’s coronation, Jones presented his readers with numerous pieces dedicated to Napoleon, including an article from the *General Evening Post* titled “The Death of the First Consul, and the Birth of the Emperor”. In it, the “First Consul” had died in 1804 as a result of an “Imperial purple fever” and the newly-born Emperor is told admiringly that “‘There is no crime you have not basely perpetrated, nor a virtue that you have not wilfully violated, insulted and scorned. These are undeniable claims to revolutionary authority, and a genuine merit to obtain a revolutionary sceptre’.”

Poems such as this sought to expose the hypocrisy and tyranny of the new imperial form of governance in post-revolutionary France. Other articles and poems were included that all served to scorn Napoleon’s new title, but two poems in particular were placed immediately before the account of Dessalines to most aptly highlight Jones’s belief that the self-coronation of post-revolutionary emperors should be a point for universal derision. The first poem, “*A Fragment*”—originally published in the *Morning Post*—proclaimed: “My God, what havoc doth Ambition make amongst thy works!” and continued to decry those “who on the right hand of Ambition stood / In the mock majesty of kingly robes”. The second, titled “Indignation, an Ode to the Continental Powers”, then asked for action among the European powers to put an end to Napoleon’s rise: “How long, ye torpid nations, will you gaze / In mute dismay, in motionless amaze / While yonder tyrant upstart uncontroll’d / Wanton with pride, with pow’r securely bold / Insults you day by day, and laughs to scorn / Your whining

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128 The idea that Napoleon was reborn as an infant emperor was echoed in satirical prints at the time: Moores, *Representations of France*, 87.
independence? – Fie for shame!”. Thus, if read alone, the account of Dessalines’s coronation could be interpreted as merely one more example of a British depiction hindered by the racist ideology of the time. But read together with these attacks on Napoleon, as Jones’s editorship no doubt intended, it is clear that for some observers Dessalines’s coronation fits into a more universal narrative against the rise of post-revolutionary illegitimate rulers that challenged the concept of traditional hierarchies and governance.

Jones’s final editorial trick in this attack on Napoleon was not only to align the French and Haitian emperors together but to also position them both unfavourably against a mock-mayor of Britain. Beginning in the eighteenth century in the English hamlet of Garrat, a series of mock elections were held. They often elected labourers and other laymen to the position of ‘mayor’ of the hamlet at the same time as Britain’s general elections. The elections became notorious in southern England and were widely reported in the press. The inclusion of a report of the “Coronation at Garrat” immediately after accounts of Dessalines and Napoleon’s coronation enabled Jones to further ridicule the nature of both leaders’ accessions and to question the legitimacy of their self-proclaimed titles. In this report, the “mayor” of Garrat, “Sir” Harry Dimsdale, had decided to take the emperor title “to the great disappointment of the citizen rabble”. But, in a show of humility absent in British depictions of the French coronation, Dimsdale decided to delay his nomination so that he did not “like a certain Corsican upstart...represent the vanity of his own ambition” and would only assume the title once he was “better assured of the sentiments of those who were to have become subjects of his Imperial sway”.

130 Ibid., 38-49.
132 Jones, Spirit of the Public Journals, 53-54. Stuart Semmel argues that Dimsdale’s election not only critiqued Napoleon but also called into question British politics and Britain’s own traditional claims to legitimate, hereditary rule: Semmel, Napoleon and the British, 118-120.
As Stuart Semmel has demonstrated, this piece was undoubtedly designed as an attack on Napoleon. But in aligning the coronations of Napoleon and Dessalines—and contrasting them with Dimsdale—Jones was able to universalise the self-serving nature of self-appointed emperors. To further this idea, Jones included a poem titled “An Imperial Ode” that more explicitly aligned the three sovereigns. Unsurprisingly, the poem portrayed Dimsdale as the preferred choice of emperor. The “mock majesty” of Napoleon was likened to Dessalines, “Who rears a throne on Domingo’s wrecks / Proclaiming freedom to his brother blacks / By fastening yokes about their necks / And tying burdens upon their backs”. Moores has highlighted how depicting Napoleon as a tyrannical dictator in British narratives meant that “following their run as rebellious cannibals, the pre-revolutionary image of the subservient French could be resurrected”—and a similar trope in the depiction of Dessalines was clearly at work here. By claiming that the Haitian emperor had once more subjected the Haitians to a state of slavery, the poem was able to align Dessalines’s despotism with Napoleon while simultaneously reducing the revolutionary citizens of Haiti once more to that of oppressed subjects and thereby diminishing their political agency as revolutionary agents. The author called to mind the violent pasts of both Dessalines and Napoleon, while in contrast the British emperor’s “robe is not so richly dy’d in human blood” and so, ultimately, “Harry’s reign, perhaps, will be the longest / And Harry’s subjects the most happy”. This celebration of an ‘emperor’ nominated in a British hamlet proposed to denounce completely both Dessalines’s and Napoleon’s claims for legitimacy by claiming that a British muffin-seller had as much authority to such claims of imperial titles. These pieces—and Jones’s careful editorship—invited British readers to view the falseness and illegitimacy of Napoleon’s newly-nominated French empire by viewing his emperorship through the lens of the

133 It is worth noting that there is evidence that this poem was circulated in both the British and American press as well. See Morning Post, 26 November 1804; The Portfolio, 17 August 1805.
134 Moores, Representations of France, 87.
'uncivilised' and 'savage' empire of Haiti and that of the imagined Emperor Dimsdale.\textsuperscript{135}

This alignment and dual denunciation of the French and Haitian emperors subsequently contributed to emerging discussions of British national identity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Historians have argued that the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth was a crucial time in British attempts to make sense of a collective national identity.\textsuperscript{136} As Colley has argued, from the beginning of the eighteenth century the British defined themselves “in reaction to the Other beyond their shores”.\textsuperscript{137} In this way, by drawing comparisons between the French and Haitian emperors, British observers were able to emphasise Napoleon’s ‘otherness’ by likening him to an even more polarising and different Other—a black, ex-slave, post-revolutionary emperor. The imperial coronations of both figures enabled some British observers to classify Napoleon and Dessalines as examples of tyrannical leaders born of revolution—and, significantly, as leaders far removed from the supposedly stable form of governance maintained by Britain’s support of traditional hierarchies. As historians such as Moores have pointed out, Napoleon’s foreignness was a commonly used factor in British depictions that underlined his illegitimacy as Emperor of France.\textsuperscript{138} Therefore, by aligning Napoleon alongside the first black emperor of the New World—but opposite the imagined British Emperor of Garrat—British loyalists were able to further cement Napoleon’s ‘otherness’ while asserting the superiority and legitimacy of Britain’s own hereditary form of rule.

Jones was not the only literary figure to see a unique opportunity in drawing parallels between Napoleon’s emperorship and that of Dessalines’s. The \textit{Female Revolutionary Plutarch}, published in 1806, was dedicated to the memory of

\textsuperscript{135} Jones, \textit{Spirit of the Public Journals}, 61-62.
\textsuperscript{137} Colley, \textit{Britons}, 6.
\textsuperscript{138} Moores, \textit{Representations of France}, 88.
Marie Antoinette, the “lamented victim of the inhospitable rage and ferocious character of revolutionary Frenchmen”.

This text positioned its loyalist sentiments to “legitimate sovereigns” that were called upon by the author to avenge Antoinette’s death at the hand of the French revolutionaries. The book was a follow-up to the 1804 anti-Napoleon tract *The Revolutionary Plutarch* and both texts are commonly credited to Lewis Goldsmith, although there appears to be little evidence to support this claim. Whoever wrote the text used it as a means to launch an unwavering attack on the claims of legitimacy and the actions of Napoleon. Central to the writing was a portrayal of Napoleon’s wife, Josephine, as a barely-disguised attack on the French emperor. In fact, Josephine was portrayed rather admiringly for such an anti-French text. The author claimed that she was able to see through the ridiculous pomp associated with her husband’s new title and that she worried about the consequences of the “lustre of those golden chains” associated with imperial titles. Likewise, according to the writer, it was Josephine—not Napoleon—who could see through the false adulation aimed at his emperorship. The effects of the French Revolution were attacked as they had made “a Corsican vagabond their sovereign”. It was claimed: “Since an emperor, he is become more intolerable and cruel. His tyranny has increased with his rank”. Central to the section on Josephine Bonaparte were the imagined letters from Josephine that criticised her husband’s decision to take the imperial nomination and hoped that he could rise above the allure of such titles. But these same ‘letters’ emphasised that Napoleon had reneged on the original republican principles upon which the French republic had been founded.

*The Female Plutarch*, as with *The Spirit of the Public Journals*, drew readers’ attentions to the coronation in Haiti in order to further question Napoleon’s claims for legitimacy. Again, the supposed focus of this section of the text—

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139 *The Female Revolutionary Plutarch, Containing Biographical, Historical, and Revolutionary Sketches, Characters and Anecdotes. Volume One*, (London: John Murray, 1806), title page.
140 Ibid., 13-19.
141 Ibid., 25, 63.
immediately after the writing on Josephine Bonaparte—was of Dessalines's wife, Marie-Claire Heureuse Félicité. But again the real focus of the piece was the empress’s husband. Whether the author of the text was aware of the name of Dessalines's wife or not is difficult to say as there is little evidence of newspapers that referred to her by name in Britain, but the text seemed unconcerned as it presented her as “Josephine Dessalines” to emphasise the similarities between the two empresses as well as to evoke the notion of imitation between the Haitian and French empires. Dessalines was also presented as Napoleon's “African brother emperor” and the similarities between them were outlined to call into question the basis for Napoleon’s claims to sovereign rule. As well as their titles, both were allegedly not “native” to their country—a first indicator of their illegitimacy. Both were guilty of crimes, particularly “genocide” and both were susceptible to the deception of those closest to them. The two emperors apparently married “cast-off Creole mistress[es]” and were susceptible to “avarice and ambition”, something which compelled them to acts of barbarity and savagery. Both leaders manipulated their judicial systems for personal gain and, perhaps most damning of all, both betrayed the men responsible for their rise to power. Unsurprisingly, the text made explicit a desire that both “usurpers” would be “swallowed up in the same tomb”—tellingly, placing the two emperors side by side in death as well as in life.142

This account of the Haitian empire went further than other reports at the time that alluded to similarities between Dessalines and Napoleon by outlining exactly how the two emperors could be viewed as being almost identical. This claim to equality in acts of tyranny would have been a radical point of departure from other contemporary accounts that still tended to show Dessalines’s emperorship as a poor imitation of Napoleon’s. The Female Plutarch almost completely removed the issue of race in order to best align the two imperial leaders as part of a strategy for most effectively attacking Napoleon. What is perhaps even more striking is the text’s assertion that Dessalines’s court was perhaps a better alternative to Napoleon’s—essentially, the best of a bad choice.

142 Ibid., 99-111.
Just how much Dessalines wanted to imitate his French counterpart was questioned and this was shown by Dessalines’s apparent refusal to take Napoleon’s name. Indeed, “Napoleon” was instead allegedly reserved for Dessalines’s favourite dog.\(^{143}\) Despite their similarities, Dessalines was viewed as “the less ambitious, the less barbarous [and] the less guilty”.\(^{144}\) According to the text, this was in part because Dessalines was surrounded by foreign diplomats in Haiti who were “more honest, more industrious, and more spirited” than those that surrounded Napoleon in France. According to the author, the diplomats of Dessalines’s court did not adhere to blind admiration and unwavering adulation like their French counterparts. Instead, if Dessalines or his court participated in fraud or reneged on agreements, the diplomats “enter and publish immediate protests”. Also, unlike in Napoleon’s France, “foreign agents are not dragged like slaves in their suit”—a reference to when Napoleon and his wife allegedly participated in public events simply so “the imperial couple may shine by the crowd and the merits of others”.\(^{145}\) A final example of the superiority of the Haitian empire over the French was the “humane, good-natured and unaffected” Haitian empress. Unlike Josephine Bonaparte, Madame Dessalines did not gamble, she gave no reason for her husband to suspect her of infidelity or disloyalty, and her “humanity” was proven in the stories that she had saved numerous whites from the massacres carried out on her husband’s orders.\(^{146}\) The praise of Empress Dessalines was not, of course, unconditional. The text alluded vaguely to her apparent “errors” but these were not detailed in any way and the author defended her by claiming that such flaws “are those of her contemporaries” and that in contrast “her good and respectable qualities belong to herself alone”. The Haitian empress was summarised as a “luminary among barbarians”. Whether the barbarians referred to here alluded to other Haitians or other empresses was left—presumably intentionally—ambiguous. But, most

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\(^{143}\) Ibid., 109.  
\(^{144}\) Ibid., 105.  
\(^{145}\) Ibid., 119-121.  
\(^{146}\) Some historians have claimed that reports of Heureuse Félicité hiding white colonists to save them from the 1804 massacres were in fact true: Dayan, *Haiti, History*, 47.
significantly, she was “beloved as a good and kind sovereign” by the Haitians—a claim that could not be made on behalf of Josephine of France.\textsuperscript{147}

The writing found in both \textit{The Female Plutarch} and \textit{The Spirit of the Public Journals} is indicative of the alternative, and often contradictory, ways with which British loyalist writers approached the nomination of Emperor Dessalines and the Haitian empire. \textit{The Spirit} relied on reports of Dessalines’s coronation that were representative of early nineteenth-century racist discourses, particularly in relation to the prospect of an independent, black figurehead. Dessalines’s blackness was undoubtedly a main focal point for a number of reports—especially of his coronation—that aimed to either ridicule the Haitian state or to mock Napoleon by drawing similarities between him and a black ex-slave. But to view British receptions to Dessalines and the infant Haitian state as a predominantly race-based reaction to the fear of a black independent state is to ignore the way in which other reports of Haiti were framed within events closer to home. British reactions to the emerging presence of a French empire and a growing body of literature aimed at denouncing Napoleon and the political ideology of imperial France meant that in Britain, at least, positive depictions of a Haitian emperor and of post-revolutionary Haiti would have complicated an easier, singular discourse aimed at denouncing post-revolutionary France. Denials of Dessalines’s legitimacy as a ruler of such a state did not necessarily represent British attitudes towards the Haitian state itself, although in some cases they would have undoubtedly played a part. Rather, these denials were part of a larger discourse aimed at both denouncing post-revolutionary states in general (and France, in particular) as well as to call into question the claims of legitimacy of these rulers. In turn, these representations sought to assert a British identity based on the ‘otherness’ of these apparently unstable, volatile self-created empires. In contrast, Britain offered legitimate, permanent and stable governance. Representations of Dessalines and Haiti were thus manipulated as tools in a concerted attempt to completely discredit the

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Female Revolutionary Plutarch}, 135-136.
emerging threat of Napoleonic France, and to assert the need and value of more traditional hereditary structures.

American perceptions of Haiti’s first head of state were similarly formed by discourses of political legitimacy. In particular, Dessalines’s coronation as emperor united American observers in their denunciations of a black revolutionary who sought to implement the policies and ceremonies of Old World dynasties. The significance of Dessalines’s emperor title was thus asserted in American discourses that debated the best way forward for the American republic and the ways in which its own government should function. Denunciations of the emperor served to further the cause of both sides of the American political divide. Federalists used depictions of the ‘chaos’ found in Haiti to emphasise the social and political calamities that can befall a nation when traditional social and political hierarchies are allowed to be completely eradicated. Democratic-Republicans used Dessalines as evidence of the ‘farcical’ nature of Old World dynasties and the ease with which they could be replicated—something that helped to expose the baselessness of hereditary claims to true political legitimacy. In this way, Dessalines’s presence as a political agent was as central to American derision of self-created dynasties everywhere as it was to racist denunciations of black political sovereignty.

By framing Dessalines within narratives that disapproved of self-nominated imperial titles, both British and American writers were able to categorise a highly divisive and paradoxical political figure. As Stuart Semmel has argued, Napoleon “did not readily fit into pre-existing political or national categories” and the same could certainly be said for Dessalines as Britons and Americans observed the imperial rise of the ex-slave revolutionary.\textsuperscript{148} If Haitian independence and the presence of a black political sovereign on the Atlantic stage remained an unthinkable event for British and American observers, then observers on both sides of the Atlantic looked for a way to contextualise and categorise the Haitian head of state—something that his coronation afforded an

\textsuperscript{148} Semmel, \textit{Napoleon and the British}, 19.
opportunity to do. By focusing on his imperial title, observers were able to simplify Dessalines’s narrative and render his anti-colonial voice impotent. In these discourses, Dessalines no longer represented the avenger of the New World but rather a revolutionary figure of ambition and corruption who ultimately wanted nothing more than to imitate the dynasties of Europe, especially Napoleonic France.

In this sense, the significance of Dessalines’s imperial nomination in studies on American and British receptions of the Haitian leader—and of the early years of Haiti’s independence as a whole—should not be overlooked. In particular, the way that the meaning of his imperial title was appropriated sheds light on the competing political ideologies and discourses at play on both sides of the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century—discourses that made acceptance of an Emperor of Haiti almost impossible. If, as Deborah Jenson insists, Dessalines intended to be a “critic emperor” who refused the notion of hereditary power and who used the title simply in an attempt to secure political respect for Haiti from the Atlantic community, this was either lost on or ignored by the majority of transatlantic observers.149 Negative depictions of Dessalines sat more comfortably within dialogues that sought to demean post-revolutionary, self-created dynasties in general and which in turn reaffirmed political identities and ideologies in America and Britain. To return to Philippe Girard’s observation that in the aftermath of the massacres Atlantic observers often sought to “confine Dessalines to a black and Haitian world”, Dessalines’s coronation was in fact followed by attempts to displace Dessalines from this confinement and to situate him in the centre of discussions that sought to call into question the very notion of post-revolutionary legitimacy throughout the Atlantic world.150 If Napoleon at this time was “a walking case study for the student of legitimacy”, then the reign of Emperor Dessalines was often included as an integral part of such studies.151

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Dessalines’s relatively short reign as Emperor of Haiti came to a violent end on 17 October 1806. Troops dissatisfied at his increasingly autocratic form of leadership rebelled against their leader and his body was bayoneted and cut to pieces. Only a local woman saved his remains from being desecrated further and insisted on a proper burial. Laurent Dubois has observed that the nature of Dessalines’s demise was “a tragic testament to the way that Haiti’s glorious independence collapsed into violence”.\textsuperscript{152} In general, American and British newspapers seemed happy to maintain the narrative that Dessalines’s cruelty and tyranny led to his brutal downfall. Early depictions of his death focused on Haiti once again freeing itself from tyranny and finding “tranquillity” with the removal of the emperor.\textsuperscript{153} Newspapers published propaganda notices written by his political rival, Alexandre Pétion, and his advisers that celebrated Dessalines’s death and the “campaign against tyranny”. These reports insisted that the extent of Dessalines’s autocracy was such that it unified the whole of Haiti as blacks and mulattoes, soldiers and labourers, all took up arms and wished for an end to his reign. The violent death of the Haitian emperor was proof for some observers of the need for moderate and inclusive government as ultimately “tyrants have many flatterers, but no friends”.\textsuperscript{154} Dessalines’s death and the public reaction against his form of rule served to strengthen the idea in American and British reports that violent, self-fulfilling modes of government bred instability and revolutionary sentiment. Where observers on both sides of the Atlantic had hitherto used Dessalines’s rise to power to denounce the concept of post-revolutionary emperors, his death confirmed the folly of these self-created dynasties and reaffirmed the apparently superior and stable modes of government found in America and Britain.

\textsuperscript{152} Dubois, \textit{Haiti}, 50. 
\textsuperscript{153} In Britain, see for example: \textit{Morning Post}, 1 January 1807; \textit{Newcastle Courant}, 10 January 1807. In America, see: \textit{Connecticut Gazette}, 10 December 1806. 
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Newcastle Courant}, 10 January 1807.
Chapter Three

“The First Crowned King of the New World”: King Christophe and the Question of Legitimacy in the Atlantic World

After the assassination of Dessalines, Henry Christophe—a fellow leading figure in the Haitian Revolution—was named his successor. Almost immediately, Christophe met strong political opposition from Alexandre Pétion, another commander during the Revolution. From the beginning of 1807, a number of civil wars broke out as Christophe and Pétion battled for supremacy and each attempted to unite Haiti under their own proposed government. Newspapers reported on the turmoil as they described the chaotic battles that were "attended with much bloodshed".¹ Reports such as these were often filled with inaccurate suggestions that Christophe had been killed, with some reports claiming with equal inaccuracy that his death had come as a result of his attempts to establish himself as the new Emperor of Haiti.² In fact, Christophe eventually named himself ‘President and Generalissimo’ of the north of Haiti while Pétion—believing that Christophe aimed to emulate Dessalines’s autocratic form of governance—established a separate Republic of Haiti with his followers in the south of the country.

The presence of two presidents ruling separate states in Haiti would last until Christophe’s decision to adopt a monarchical title in 1811 and to establish the kingdom of Haiti in the north. These two distinct forms of government and the political ideologies they represented led to a substantial increase in commentary on the political legitimacy and potential sovereignty of Haiti on both sides of the Atlantic. American and British interest largely centred on Christophe’s reign in the north of Haiti, probably because mercantile observers saw more potential in favourable trade relations being established with the English-speaking Christophe than with the French-speaking Pétion. This interest was also solicited

¹ New York Spy, 10 February 1807; Caledonian Mercury, 28 March 1807.
² Connecticut Gazette, 11 February 1807; Portland Gazette, 16 February 1807; Hull Packet, 7 April 1807.
by Christophe himself who—at the first few years in which his power in the north had been cemented—began an aggressive propaganda campaign on both sides of the Atlantic by circulating state documents and favourable reports of his government, ensuring he was at the centre of American and British discussions of Haitian sovereignty.

Even within the abundance of scholarly work now being produced on the Haitian Revolution and the impact of Haitian independence for the Atlantic world, the figure of Christophe still tends to feature as a footnote in such discussions. However, the work that has been produced on the self-proclaimed “first crowned monarch of the New World” has explored the possible motivations behind this creation of monarchy as well as highlighting the ways in which Christophe attempted to perform his legitimacy as a monarchical sovereign. Most notably, Sybille Fischer has discussed the “paradoxical” creation of Christophe’s monarchy and the possible reasons behind it. While historians had hitherto dismissed Christophe’s monarchy as primarily emanating from “vanity”, Fischer’s work has demonstrated that the desire to consolidate and strengthen his power in Haiti and to assert racial equality with the other leaders of the Atlantic world were the motivating factors behind Christophe’s change to a monarchical government. Fischer’s seminal study also examines Christophe’s numerous proclamations and constitutions—documents which, Fischer argues, were constructed and circulated among the Atlantic press in order to visibly and tangibly assert his monarchical authority and legitimacy as a sovereign power. Other scholars have similarly noted how Christophe himself attempted to project a positive ‘kingly’ image to the British public with the circulation of a number of images and reports from within Haiti that painted the monarchy in a positive

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3 Christophe gave himself this title prior to his coronation in 1811: Dubois, *Haiti*, 61.
5 Ibid., 245-259. For an example of this kind of dismissiveness, see Cole, *Christophe*, 191. This re-evaluation of Christophe has led other historians to draw similar conclusions as Fischer. Most notably, see Dubois, *Haiti*, 54-64.
light. As David Geggus's work has shown, these attempts involved Christophe turning to the British abolitionists in order to help him secure diplomatic recognition for Haiti. It is widely accepted that Christophe modelled his form of monarchy on the British example as he attempted to flatter British politicians into officially recognising Haiti’s independence. Some scholars have further claimed that Christophe truly admired British culture and that his respect for and admiration of British statesmen in Haiti might have had a major influence in the creation of the Haitian monarchy.

This chapter seeks to build on this existing scholarship by arguing that the projections of Christophe’s monarchical status—and American and British reactions to these depictions—need to be read in a wider context of transatlantic attitudes to traditional monarchies and post-revolutionary states in the 1810s. American and British commentaries on the Haitian monarchy often had less to do with any real concerns for the progress of the Haitian kingdom itself and more to do with its value in supporting American and British political ideologies and modes of governance. Laurent Dubois has observed that Christophe’s monarchy is often remembered as a kind of “historical joke”, while Marlene Daut has pointed out that American reports that mocked the idea of a black monarchy were in part designed to “suggest that there is a kind of hypocrisy in a former black slave crowning himself king when it was a king who had subjugated him in the first place”. While both observations are undoubtedly true, contemporary representations of King Christophe often placed the Haitian monarchy in the centre of discussions of political legitimacy and the roles of monarchies in the

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7 Geggus, “Haiti and the Abolitionists,” 121-126.
9 Dubois, *Haiti*, 64; Marlene Daut, ”The "Alpha and Omega" of Haitian Literature: Baron De Vastey and the U.S. Audience of Haitian Political Writing,” *Comparative Literature* 64, no. 1 (2012), 56.
Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century. The way in which American and British observers reflected on the apparent superiority over their own form of government—while also deriding the modes of governance of their enemies—was often a crucial factor as to whether the Haitian monarch elicited support or derision during his reign.

In the early nineteenth century, the still-young American republic looked to further cement a political foothold in an Atlantic world dominated by the dynasties of Europe. Gordon Wood has highlighted how by the 1810s Americans viewed with increasing urgency the necessity of separating themselves from the political ideologies of the Old World and adopting political thought and practices that best represented a truly republican New World government.\(^{10}\) These feelings strengthened considerably after the War of 1812 with Britain. The end of the war has been described as a “watershed of American democracy”. Republican political ideology strengthened as presumptions about the “natural superiority of well-born and well-bred gentlemen, challenged during the American Revolution, now fell”.\(^{11}\) Caitlin Fitz has further demonstrated how republican movements in Latin America after the War of 1812 further promoted American nationalism as America was depicted as “leading the entire hemisphere to global greatness”.\(^{12}\) Such nationalism also developed in the face of the re-strengthening of conservative political ideology in Europe by the mid-1810s with Napoleon defeated for a final time. After the resulting Congress of Vienna in 1815, the traditional dynasties of Europe once more consolidated their power, establishing a “paternal alliance of monarchs over their peoples”.\(^{13}\) As a result, American political commentators decried Old World notions of governance with increasing vehemence and looked to situate the American republic as the only truly enlightened political state in the Atlantic. In this

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\(^{10}\) Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 469-470.

\(^{11}\) Wilentz, *American Democracy*, 177.


context, the presence of a New World sovereign—one apparently styled on Old World forms of monarchy—became a source of heated contention in American discourses on political legitimacy.

With the ongoing wars with Napoleonic France, British loyalists continued to deride the ‘upstart’ Napoleon and constantly sought to de-legitimise his self-created imperial sovereignty.\textsuperscript{14} The removal of the threat of Napoleon with his final defeat by the European allies in 1815—and the restoration of conservative power throughout Europe that resulted—was largely welcomed by British loyalists, although the restored Bourbon monarchy in France would become the new focus of derision and attack in Britain.\textsuperscript{15} Questions of legitimacy and the virtues of monarchism for a nation and its citizens were also pertinent in Britain at a time when George III had been deemed unfit to rule and his son—the future king, George IV—ruled on his behalf from 1811, which was coincidentally the same year that Christophe was crowned King of Haiti. In a further coincidence, the Regency in Britain would last until 1820—the same year that the Haitian monarchy would cease to exist with the death of Christophe. As Linda Colley has highlighted, despite the unpopularity of the Prince Regent, George III had experienced considerable popularity with the British public from the second half of his reign—that support would remain until his death in 1820, and beyond. Although in general “monarchy’s reputation in Great Britain...fluctuated wildly over time”, the support for the latter part of George III’s reign meant that the British monarchy had become “more celebrated, more broadly popular and more unalloyedly patriotic than it had been for a century at least”.\textsuperscript{16} In a climate that celebrated the virtues of British monarchical rule—but that which derided some foreign forms of monarchy and self-created dynasties—the legitimacy of a self-created monarch (apparently styled on the popular British King George III) became a contentious point of reference in British political discourses concerned with the notion of legitimacy.

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\textsuperscript{14} Semmel, \textit{Napoleon and the British}, 110-120. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Moores, \textit{Representations of France}, 97. \\
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Julia Gaffield has argued that the strategies of Christophe to secure diplomatic recognition from within the Atlantic world “reflect an international context in which ongoing warfare among European empires informed the actions of these governments and created openings for the new nation of Haiti”. Similarly, American and British representations of Christophe need to be read in this “international context” of the shifting and volatile geopolitical space of the Atlantic world. This was a period of time in which “a fundamental change occurred in the governing rules, norms, and practices of international politics”. This chapter therefore demonstrates how the legitimacy of the Haitian monarchy was constantly asserted or denied at distinct moments of political convenience for American and British observers. The varying nature of depictions of Christophe throughout his reign in American and British newspapers and periodicals highlights how the paradoxical presence of a self-established hereditary monarchy in a post-revolutionary, post-colonial state clearly presented a significant number of challenges and opportunities to both supporters and opponents of Haiti at this time. Critics of Christophe at times aligned him alongside the other self-created sovereigns of Europe—most notably Napoleon—to underline the illegitimacy of these self-created dynasties. Others, particularly in America, in fact underlined his monarchical status to ‘expose’ the transparency and baselessness of traditional forms of monarchy as exemplified in Britain. Supporters, on the other hand, asserted that Christophe had an equal, if not better claim to legitimacy than the new European sovereigns such as Napoleon. Positive depictions such as these in Britain tended to praise Christophe for his decision to adopt a royal title, while American supporters ‘excused’ his kingly status. In both cases, pro-Christophe accounts centred on the apparent progress Haiti had made under his guidance, thereby asserting the need for a sense of paternalism from political leaders—regardless of their mode of governance. Christophe’s monarchical title thus became a significant heuristic tool for some observers by which to question the notion of legitimacy in Old and New World governments as well as to support the forms of government in their

own respective countries. In turn, these calls to support or refute the Haitian monarch’s claims to legitimacy contributed significantly to debates over whether the sovereignty of the Haitian state should be officially recognised by the governments of America and Britain.

**American Reactions to President Christophe**

From the very beginning of Christophe’s rule over northern Haiti, the title he would take and the form of government that would be adopted was a central concern for a number of American newspapers. In general, in the early days of Christophe’s succession to Dessalines, American newspapers were primarily interested in trying to make sense of the civil war that raged between Christophe and Pétion as both leaders battled for supremacy of the whole of Haiti. But the few reports that engaged more directly with the figure of Christophe emphasised his alignment with Emperor Dessalines as they speculated on how Haiti’s new political leadership would be shaped. Newspapers such as the *Connecticut Gazette* claimed that Christophe was “aspiring to the office of Emperor of Hayti” while others still—such as the *New York Spy*—claimed that Christophe was looking to “frame a constitution to appoint him Emperor of Haiti”.\(^{19}\) Reports such as these were often in direct contrast to reflections on Pétion, who was said to be “taking the side of the people” in his development of a “new republican constitution”.\(^{20}\) In this sense, before he had even secured his leadership of the north of Haiti, Christophe was at risk of being typecast as an imperial successor to his detested predecessor—a title that was positioned directly against the apparently republican aspirations of his rival.

This perception of Christophe as an imperial heir-apparent nevertheless changed for a number of American observers when news filtered through that he had in fact rewritten Dessalines's imperial constitution, naming himself in the process

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\(^{19}\) *Connecticut Gazette*, 11 February 1807; *New York Spy*, 10 February 1807. Similar reports appeared in newspapers such as *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger*, 9 February 1807; *Columbian Centinel*, 11 February 1807.

\(^{20}\) *Connecticut Gazette*, 11 February 1807; *The Democrat*, 14 February 1807.
‘President and Generalissimo’ of Haiti. If Christophe’s adoption of a presidential title was in part motivated by a desire to project an image of more stable governance to international audiences, then this seemed to achieve moderate success in the American press. A number of American newspapers affirmed Christophe’s presidential status, while other reports also printed Haiti’s new constitution. In reality Christophe’s was an “all-powerful presidency”, which afforded him almost complete political control of the north of Haiti. However, this was something that was not picked up on—or simply ignored—by a number of reports that suddenly wrote approvingly of a president who promised to “preserve the liberty of the country”. Although such depictions certainly stopped short of offering unconditional praise to Haiti’s new head of state, in most cases Christophe’s presidential title was respectfully observed. Other reports spoke of the “dignity” of President Christophe and of his “devotion to the public good”. Therefore, it appears Christophe’s presidential title helped to legitimise his status as a sovereign political ruler in the pages of at least some American publications.

Such depictions of a dignified presidential Christophe offered a stark contrast to the apparent tyranny and despotism of Dessalines’s emperorship, as attested to by a number of American newspapers. Affirmations of the apparent stability that Christophe’s mode of government—supported by his constitution—had brought Haiti would have served those who opposed Jefferson’s trade embargo between Americans and Haiti as well as to suggest that trade with Haiti could be safe and prosperous for American merchants. The absence of support for Christophe

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21 See, for example: Relf’s Philadelphia Gazette, 25 March 1807; American and Commercial Advertiser, 28 March 1807; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, 2 April 1807.
22 Fischer, Modernity Disavowed, 227; Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 163.
23 Mercantile Advertiser, 24 February 1807.
24 Trenton Federalist 30 March 1807. Also published for example in Republican Watch-Tower, 3 April 1807; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser 2 April 1807.
before his presidential constitution is evidence of the anxiety among Americans that he would in fact adopt a similar imperial mode of government as Dessalines—a model of government for which it would have been difficult to elicit support from an American republican audience. As such, Christophe’s presidential status was largely welcomed in mercantile newspapers, which were suddenly able to align Christophe ideologically with the republican principles of their readers to garner more support for a formal commercial relationship with the Haitian state.

To elicit such support, a number of newspapers spoke glowingly of Christophe’s constitution in an attempt to legitimise the new Haitian government. The *Eastern Argus*’s summary of Christophe’s constitution wrote approvingly that “order is to be maintained, military service required...divorce forbidden, marriage honored, [and] agriculture encouraged”, thus portraying the constitution as a tool through which stability in Haiti could be achieved. However, reports such as these focused more directly on the question of trade by highlighting articles in the constitution that alluded to the protection of foreign merchants and that “weights and measure [would be] fixed”. Although most reports of the constitution offered little in the way of editorial commentary, mercantile newspapers such as New York’s *Mercantile Advertiser* outlined more directly the advantages of Haiti’s new northern government, leading the newspaper to claim that Christophe’s constitution “appears to be dictated by a policy both liberal and wise —Wise because it points and recommends the most salutary objects of national wealth and prosperity, viz. agriculture, industry, military discipline and sound morality—liberal, inasmuch as it inculcates, towards the nations and individuals who may hereafter trade with the state, the principles of generosity and justice”. The *Advertiser* concluded that should Christophe follow such principles, Haiti would “enjoy a virtuous and permanent

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26 *Eastern Argus*, 9 April 1807.
27 Ibid.
In this way, Christophe’s presidential title and constitution certainly found a receptive audience, particularly among American newspapers with commercial trading interests.

It would not be long before American allusions to political friendship with the Haitian government would be tested, however. By 1808, stories began to emerge in the American press that Christophe was becoming hostile to American merchants. Publications such as the *New York Commercial Advertiser* now began to speak of the “British born” Christophe and his “partiality towards the English, as well as his contempt for the Americans”, something which was “apparent on every occasion”. In the light of such stories, any notion of overt support cooled and only a couple of years later, the distinctly more threatening prospect of explicit contempt towards Americans from the Haitian president would be exacerbated by claims that Christophe had in fact detained a number of American ships—apparently in retaliation of the American government seizing Haitian vessels. These reports admitted that the American seizure of ships bound for Haiti gave Christophe “some excuse” for his retaliation. But they nonetheless predicted that the Haitian leader would soon “commit his depredations without deigning to give a reason for his conduct”. Thus, such reports attempted to cement an image of a Haitian leader acting outside the parameters of conventional commercial and political conduct.

The emergence of stories such as these mark a distinct shift in perception among American newspapers. Although reports could rarely be said to have lavished praise on Christophe before this, his presidential title—as well as his proclamations that suggested an openness to friendly foreign trade—certainly elicited at least a sense of neutrality among a large proportion of America’s press. However, even mercantile publications such as the *New York Commercial Advertiser* evidently felt that any show of ‘contempt’ towards American merchants meant that the Haitian head of state needed to be rebuked. This

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28 *Mercantile Advertiser*, 31 March 1807.  
29 *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 20 January 1808.  
animosity would increase further as newspapers such as the *American Citizen* alleged that American vessels “have long been subjected, by this savage and blood thirsty chief, to capture” and that American seamen had been subjected to “imprisonment, to whippings, and to famine”.\(^{31}\) Other newspapers, such as *Poulson’s Daily Advertiser* alluded to the imprisonment of American sailors while also claiming that Christophe took American cargoes “at his own prices, and pays, when, and how, he pleases”.\(^{32}\) This claim against Christophe was particularly pertinent as American readers would have been fully aware that the extortionate financial demands of a foreign leader acting with contempt towards American merchants helped to instigate the First Barbary War of 1801-1805.\(^{33}\) Stories of Christophe’s apparent cruelty emerged at a time when citizens of the young American republican believed that their government was afforded too little respect both at home and abroad.\(^{34}\) In this context, stories of a foreign head of state seizing American vessels would have been a particular affront to American national pride.

While reports such as these suggest a genuine disdain for Christophe’s perceived dislike of Americans, they also seem to have been motivated by an apparent lack of protection from the American government towards American merchants. Although America’s official prohibition of trade with Haiti had ended in 1810—the same year as these reports emerged of Christophe’s alleged treatment of American merchants—James Madison’s government still refused to officially recognise Haiti’s sovereignty. As Julia Gaffield highlights, this meant that merchants “did not have the typical diplomatic means to resolve conflicts or disputes that arose during their economic ventures”.\(^{35}\) *Poulson’s Daily Advertiser* claimed in its report that in contrast to Americans, British merchants were able

\(^{31}\) *American Citizen*, 7 September 1810.

\(^{32}\) *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, 4 September 1810. For details of further claims made by American merchants about Christophe seizing ships and cargo in the 1810s see Gaffield, ""Outrages on the Laws of Nations"," 171-173.


\(^{34}\) Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 177-182.

\(^{35}\) Gaffield, ""Outrages on the Laws of Nations"," 171.
to trade “in the best manner they can”, while the *American Citizen* lamented that the American seamen imprisoned and tortured were “unprotected” by their own government. Reports that lambasted the Haitian head of state were—at least in part—constructed to highlight the perceived inaction and lack of care afforded to American merchants from their own government. By emphasising the apparent despotism and cruelty of the Haitian leader, pro-trade newspapers could better attest to the need for the American government to keep a watchful eye over its merchants that traded with Haiti and foreign powers more generally. These reports in turn served to delegitimise Christophe as a political leader by emphasising his apparent tyranny and greed. Ironically, the ‘protection’ that such publications craved would have been best secured by American diplomatic recognition of the Haitian state and of Christophe himself. Either way, depictions of a Haitian head of state were once again at the mercy of American domestic political wrangling.

Stories of Christophe’s alleged cruelty allowed American newspapers to effectively conclude that the Haitian leader no longer embodied the ‘virtuous’ nature of a republican presidency. Therefore, such reports instigated a general move to deny Christophe’s presidential title and to instead refer to him once more as the “black Emperor” or with racialised imperial titles such as “his sable highness Christophe” or the “sable demagogue”.36 Such titles were evident from the beginning of Christophe’s reign but they certainly increased in number around this time. Stories of Christophe’s un-presidential behaviour now widely circulated in the American press. His decision to rename Cape Francois as “Cape Henry” was viewed as an act of vanity, which meant that these reports no longer alluded to ‘President Christophe’ but rather someone who was “styling himself President”.37 Christophe was now presented to American readers as a “cruel” and “cunning” leader, with a “despotic” government and whose “word is a law”.38 In contrast, Pétion and his southern republic were once more portrayed in much

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36 *Evening Post*, 25 May 1810; *New York Herald*, 26 May 1810; *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* 4 September 1810; *American Citizen* 7 September 1810.
37 *Evening Post*, 27 August 1810.
38 *Connecticut Mirror*, 3 September 1810; *Anti-Monarchist*, 5 September 1810.
more favourable terms. Within these narratives, the president of southern Haiti was framed as the “just, generous, and humane” alternative to the “rapacious and cruel” Christophe.³⁹ It is important to note that while some newspapers were clearly exasperated with the actions of one Haitian president, they also clearly wanted the possibility of trade with the southern president to remain a distinct possibility.

To better frame Christophe as an illegitimate suitor to the virtues of a republican presidency, American newspapers aligned denunciations of the Haitian leader with another self-nominated head of state, Napoleon. Echoing the ways in which American newspapers aligned Dessalines with the French emperor, Christophe’s leadership was now framed in an analogous way. Reports of the seizures of American ships led newspapers to conclude that Christophe “treats our flags with the same indignity, that his Brother Emperour [sic] does in Europe”. Although Christophe was said to have responded in retaliation to American actions, newspapers warned that he would act with increasing despotism “like his brother Napoleon”.⁴⁰ Such reports accordingly drew on memories of the early ‘promise’ of Napoleon’s republican vision—one that descended into despotism. This same fate was clearly predicted to befall Christophe. These reports exposed a clear fear of the prospect of a post-revolutionary leader operating with as much freedom and tyrannical autonomy in the New World as Napoleon was doing in Europe. The similarities between the two self-created ‘despots’ would be solidified with Christophe’s decision to officially adopt a royal title.

³⁹ The Balance and New York State Journal, 26 June 1810. See also Connecticut Mirror, 3 September 1810 as an example of other more favourable reporting of Pétion’s apparently more moderate form of governing.
⁴⁰ This story was particularly widely reported. See for example, Evening Post, 25 May 1810; New York Herald, 26 May 1810; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, 4 September 1810. Other newspapers reported on other seizures in the following months: Columbian Centinel, 30 January 1811.
A New World Monarch and American Perceptions of Legitimacy

By the middle of 1811, reports of Christophe’s coronation as King of Haiti began to circulate widely throughout the American press. Depictions of the newly-created black court regularly emphasised Christophe’s blackness in order to ridicule the ‘absurdity’ of a black king. Depictions of the “brilliant coronation” of “their sable majesties” made references to Christophe’s “unchangeable ebony complexion and majestic form”. Articles such as these adopted and mocked loyalist rhetoric to more fully expose the supposedly farcical nature of bowing to a black king. The “mighty Christophe” was allegedly adorned with a “golden crown” and the finest jewels while he sat on his “ivory throne”. Exotic portrayals of “his colored majesty” undoubtedly played a significant role in this negative reception to a New World monarch—portrayals that were not as abundant during his presidency. And so, if an autonomous black political leader could be ‘tolerated’ for the purposes of trade, a black king was evidently more challenging to accept for an American audience. In this sense, Christophe’s monarchical status would be equally, if not more, contentious than his race for American observers.

Christophe’s new title meant that he was further aligned with his post-revolutionary imperial ‘brother’ Napoleon, as American newspapers looked for a conceptual framework within which to discuss this self-created New World king. In these reports, Christophe’s apparent vanity and desire for imperial titles and the “pomp” attached to them was a direct imitation of the French emperor. Newspapers such as the New Jersey Journal claimed that it was “difficult to tell which of the two, Christophe or Bonaparte, exceed each other in pomp and splendour”. Other newspapers such as Poulson’s Daily American Advertiser drew parallels between the metaphorical birth of Haiti’s king and the baptism of Napoleon’s son—and the future King of Rome—which they stated “for splendour

41 The Tickler, 31 July 1811; Philadelphia Gazette, 6 December 1811. Marlene Daut’s work best highlights the confronting nature of Christophe’s race for an American audience: Daut, “‘Alpha and Omega’,” 56-58.
42 New Jersey Journal, 30 July 1811.
is full equal to the parade at Hayti”. 43 Other reports insisted that the “plan of erecting a monarchy was in being a long time” but Christophe had “waited for the consent of the emperor of France” before he proclaimed the Haitian monarchy. 44 The suggestion that the Haitian head of state looked for approval and permission from the detested Napoleon diminished Christophe’s agency as a viable political leader, reducing him to a kind of mock monarch who was unable to display enlightened or individual political thought and who instead waited for the approval of Europe’s imperial leaders. But more than this, it allowed observers to question the legitimacy of both Christophe and Napoleon by drawing comparisons and exposing the ‘absurdity’ of replacing republican forms of government with the trappings of imperial government. In this sense, both Christophe and Napoleon asserted the other’s illegitimacy as leaders of post-revolutionary states.

The question of Christophe’s legitimacy would soon find an even more pertinent resonance only a couple of years after his coronation. By 1812 America was again at war with Britain—a conflict that would last until 1815. Jon Latimer has noted that by 1812, aside from a “pro-British Federalist minority” there was in fact “little to moderate” the “passionate” anti-British sentiments that had continued from America’s revolutionary war. 45 Others have argued that America’s decision to go to war in part centred on the desire of Democratic-Republicans to cement a republican national identity for America—an identity that had been threatened ever since independence from both the British and American Federalists. 46 Historians have argued that the War of 1812 “permanently altered the structure of American politics” and, in particular, led to a re-evaluation and reassertion of the superiority of America’s republican form of government. 47 According to Gordon Wood the culmination of the war “finally” established for Americans “the independence and nationhood of the United

43 Poulson’s Daily American Advertiser, 23 July 1811.
44 Philadelphia Gazette, 20 August 1811.
46 Wood, Empire of Liberty, 668-669.
47 Wilentz, American Democracy, 141.
States that so many had previously doubted".  

A large number of Americans at this time believed that the British monarchy not only represented a threat to America but to the very concept of republicanism globally. Therefore, American national identity was heightened as a result of their war—an identity that was centred on America’s ‘otherness’ to the ‘despotic’ and ‘tyrannical’ hereditary dynasties of the Old World, as exemplified by Britain.

Caitlin Fitz has furthered this by arguing that the War of 1812 led American observers to depict the republican movements in Spanish America in the 1810s as evidence of the virtues of republicanism. According to Fitz, this prompted a “wave of nationalism” among American observers as they imagined “the Western Hemisphere as a happily independent republican community at a time when Europe seemed to be crumbling under the weight of dynastic alliances and monarchical tyranny”. Whether a continuation of Christophe’s presidency and his ‘republican’ mode of governing would have meant that Haiti would have been included in this celebration of republicanism is uncertain. What is clear is that his adoption of monarchy meant that in general Haiti would not only be excluded from these celebratory narratives but Christophe’s kingdom would be used by American republicans as a model of the corrupt and tyrannical nature of monarchy.

During the War of 1812—and particularly after America’s bitter struggle against Britain—denunciations of hereditary dynasties and the ideologies they asserted became a constant fixture in American newspapers. Newspapers such as the Essex Register printed articles that rhetorically questioned what constituted a “legitimate” head of state. In their eyes, the absurdity of Old World claims to legitimacy could be best exemplified by the situation in Britain. If the English monarchy was “truly legitimate” then, the Register asserted, “madness is a

48 Wood, Empire of Liberty, 699.
49 Hanson, Democratic Imagination, 105.
51 Essex Register, 1 July 1815.
quality of legitimacy, since, in virtue of the legitimate claim, the old king, George III, continues to reign notwithstanding he is insane”. The Register went on to question whether an English king—particularly one who was very publicly perceived as insane at this point—could still be a “legitimate” leader simply because of his hereditary title. The same report further wondered what else could be said of the Prince Regent who, for the Register and numerous other newspapers, was proof that “drunkenness, seduction, and undisguised salacity, are qualities of a legitimate monarch”. For others, Britain’s new war against America was further proof of the tyranny and thirst for conquest of hereditary monarchs. If the Prince Regent was seen to be avenging his father’s loss of the American colonies in the War of Independence, reports summarised that in doing so “the HEREDITARY IDIOT evinced the legitimacy of his royal descent, and the legitimacy of his royal virtues”.52 Other newspapers questioned the basis of hereditary rule and the notion of ‘royal blood’ as they outlined the scandalised lineage of the British monarchy—one that they claimed was tainted by the illicit affairs of its monarchs with prostitutes and servants.53

In addition to the impact that the War of 1812 had on political discourses, questions of legitimacy and the actions of Europe’s dynasties were scrutinised even more intensely in America by 1815. In this year Napoleon was defeated for a final time by the European allies and the resultant Congress of Vienna aimed to restore and reinforce the political ideologies of traditional and monarchical forms of governance. Americans perceived this meeting of “self-created august legislators” as an act that restored conservative and traditional power in Europe, particularly with the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France, which was described in one newspaper as “the most scandalous abuse that ever has been made...of human reason among an enlightened people”.54 By perceiving this “conservative reaction” in Europe, “Americans were coming to believe that their

52 National Advocate, 9 Jan 1815.
53 See for example Alexandria Herald, 1 September 1815; National Standard, 20 September 1815.
54 Weekly Aurora, 2 August 1815; The Enquirer, 8 July 1815.
democracy was all the more peculiar and significant”.\textsuperscript{55} In reaction to the Congress of Vienna, American newspapers poured scorn on British and French claims to liberty and freedom to assert that these monarchies in contrast were in fact “crushing the rights of the world to elevate the usurped authority of sceptres”.\textsuperscript{56} Despite the aims of the Congress to unite Europe once more and restore peace and order, American reports argued that “Europe can never know peace, or repose, or happiness, so long as the present inhuman and unnatural dynasties exist; so long as\textit{legitimacy} has either its present meaning or power”.\textsuperscript{57} Newspaper articles situated American republicanism directly opposite the “monstrous principles of Monarchy, or what is now falsely styled ‘legitimacy’”, arguing that these dynastic forms of power had “enslaved and degraded Europe, and threaten to bind the civilised World in chains”.\textsuperscript{58}

Representations of Christophe in America at this time, therefore, need to be considered within the political atmosphere in which they were constructed, although a number of negative reports of the Haitian king undoubtedly were motivated by the monarch’s race. Newspapers such as Georgetown’s \textit{The Messenger} claimed that Christophe’s “imitation” of monarchy was “proof” that “negroes were a species of monkey”, while other newspapers claimed that Christophe “aped royalty”.\textsuperscript{59} As a result of the War of 1812 and conservative events in Europe, however, Americans had come to believe that their nation remained as “the only beacon of republicanism...in a thoroughly monarchical world”.\textsuperscript{60} At a time then when American derisions of the concept of monarchy was at a fever pitch—and such denunciations were increasingly tied into Americans’ assertions of their own national identity—garnering support for the Haitian monarchy would have been particularly challenging. If newspapers at this time largely believed of “all the solemn farces which have been played off

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] \textit{National Advocate}, 23 January 1816.
\item[57] \textit{New Jersey Journal}, 4 June 1816.
\item[58] \textit{Essex Register}, 6 March 1816.
\item[59] Relf’s \textit{Philadelphia Gazette}, 25 October 1816; \textit{The Messenger}, 26 October 1816.
\item[60] Wood, \textit{Empire of Liberty}, 701.
\end{footnotes}
man, that of hereditary kings is the most silly”, then how could newspapers offer concurrent support for the Haitian monarch?\textsuperscript{61}

American newspapers from as early as 1812 recognised the presence of “the first crowned monarch of the New World”, while wishing “this is the last”.\textsuperscript{62} Newspapers such as the New-England Palladium reported rather hopefully on the death of Christophe in 1812 and, more importantly, the death of his “Imperial Government”.\textsuperscript{63} By 1813—with the war with the British monarchy well under way—American newspapers increased their animosity towards the Haitian king. Reports claimed that the king “governs with all the tyranny of a despot” and that he “inspires terror in the capital whenever he shews [sic] himself in public”.\textsuperscript{64} Where American newspapers had before published Christophe’s presidential proclamations with curiosity, the supposed likeness of Haiti’s imperial proclamations to the royal decrees found in Europe meant that some newspapers no longer had the “inclination” to do so.\textsuperscript{65} Clearly, where Christophe had earlier found pockets of support, the Haitian monarch was now suddenly caught in a tide of overwhelming animosity towards kings and the very concept of royalty and the image of “that monster, Christophe, the soi-disant king of Hayti” became seared in the minds of the American public.\textsuperscript{66}

The presence of King Christophe, therefore, allowed American newspapers to not only call into question the legitimacy of both Christophe’s rule but also that of the hereditary dynasties of Europe. In this way, Christophe was aligned with European monarchs and his legitimacy as a king was asserted to expose the perceived absurdity of claims that monarchism represented a superior form of political leadership. The Haitian king was said to be “resolved to be behind hand with no monarch, Oriental or European” and American newspapers thus subjected him to the same savage rhetoric as his brother sovereigns, such as the

\textsuperscript{61} American Beacon, 11 May 1816.  
\textsuperscript{62} The True American, 24 February 1812.  
\textsuperscript{63} New-England Palladium, 24 November 1812.  
\textsuperscript{64} The Broome County Patriot, 11 May 1813; Hallowell Gazette, 12 April 1815.  
\textsuperscript{65} The Chronicle, 4 July 1814.  
\textsuperscript{66} National Intelligencer, 22 July 1816.
“lunatic” George III or the “bloated idiot” the Prince Regent.\textsuperscript{67} As scholars have highlighted, newspapers tended to italicise Christophe’s royal titles in order to mock them and to call into question their legitimacy.\textsuperscript{68} But, in fact, this was in keeping with reports that did the same with the titles of Europe’s monarchs. As well as emulating these European monarchs, Christophe was shown to be the epitome of the corrupting nature of imperial titles and the “trappings of royalty” as he was “as jealous of his royal titles as any white legitimate in any part of the world”.\textsuperscript{69} In these reports, Christophe’s perceived imitation was not simply a point of ridicule but it represented a genuine desire from within the New World to adopt the maxim of constitutions such as Britain’s which asserted the “king can do no wrong”. Therefore Christophe, “seeing no reason why the tribute of infallibility should not as well belong to a king of Hayti as to a king of England”, demonstrated for sections of the American press the infectious trend for monarchies not only in Europe but now also in the New World—a trend that was the opposite of American political identity.

While attacks on Christophe in American newspapers were consistent with an anti-monarchical agenda, the publication that possibly made most use of the Haitian monarchy as a vehicle for derisions of royalty and notions of legitimacy was the widely-read \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register}. Founded in Baltimore in 1811 by Hezekiah Niles, the paper “achieved a wide and deservedly high reputation”.\textsuperscript{70} Although the \textit{Register} was said to deal with discussions “on both sides of political and economic questions”, Niles’s Anglophobia and derision for all forms of monarchy was clearly apparent, particularly in editions published in the aftermath of the War of 1812 and the restoration of conservatism in Europe by the mid-1810s.\textsuperscript{71} Niles left no sense of ambiguity when, in an article scorning the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[67] \textit{Delaware Gazette and Peninsula Advertiser}, 23 March 1815.
\item[68] See McIntosh and Pierrot, "Henry I," 129. See for example \textit{The Northern Sentinel}, 19 July 1816.
\item[69] \textit{The Republican}, 20 June 1818; \textit{Sun}, 3 December 1816.
\item[71] Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Congress of Vienna, he proclaimed: “I hate all monarchies”.\textsuperscript{72} The British—the “dear friends” of legitimacy—were a particular focus of attack in the \textit{Register}, as Niles aligned Britain’s social and economic “distresses” at this time on their attachment to royalty.\textsuperscript{73} Niles wrote approvingly of Napoleon’s brief outsting of the French monarchy in the Hundred Days War, believing that “his establishment on the throne will do more than anything else I can think of, to put down the foul doctrine as to the ‘legitimacy of princes’—a doctrine the most hateful of any that has affected the human race”.\textsuperscript{74} But with Napoleon soon removed from power once more and the Bourbons restored again, Niles turned to King Christophe to call into question the notion of hereditary legitimacy and to chastise those who supported it.

The \textit{Register} sought to directly align Christophe with his “brother sovereigns” in order to underline the alleged absurdity of monarchical legitimacy.\textsuperscript{75} The \textit{Register} reported on the celebrations of Christophe’s anniversary in 1816 by summarising that they were done “with a pomp and manner...to make us laugh at legitimacy”.\textsuperscript{76} Reports in the \textit{Register} at times drew on this ‘laughter’ by emphasising the blackness of Christophe and his court and by relying on racist ideologies of the time. One such report, described by Marlene Daut as “all-out mockery”, depicted the Haitians as “acting royalty” and detailed the members of Christophe’s court: “the countess of Lime Punch...the baroness Big Bottom...count Quince-jelly”.\textsuperscript{77} As Daut asserts, reports such as this were designed to mock the concept of a black monarchy and to “link Christophe’s blackness to imitation, robbery, treachery, and jealousy”, thereby delegitimising the very notion of a black hereditary monarchy.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register}, 27 May 1815.  
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register} 2 November 1816; 30 November 1816; 3 May 1817.  
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register} 20 May 1815.  
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register}, 12 April 1817.  
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Niles’ Weekly Register}, 2 March 1816.  
\textsuperscript{77} Daut, "‘Alpha and Omega’", 56.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Although these reports undoubtedly relied on negative racial perceptions to mock the Haitian court, they were also designed to mock more generally the concept of royalty as a whole. The explicit lesson of Haiti was, if even the “poor despised negroes” could establish a monarchy (and by this time have sustained the institution), then clearly this proved the baseless and transparent nature of hereditary monarchy.\textsuperscript{79} The Register’s report concluded, therefore, that it hoped its depiction of Christophe’s court would be viewed “as a curiosity of royalty, as for the benefit of all who desire ‘to laugh and to be fat’ at the fools and knaves who applaud it—black or white”.\textsuperscript{80} These kinds of reports served a dual purpose. Not only did they discard any serious contemplation of Christophe’s monarchy and authority, as Daut suggests, but they also served to undermine the significance of legitimacy and tradition so often used by supporters of hereditary monarchies. In essence, these reports were not simply designed to mock the presence of a black monarchy in the New World but to expose the frivolity of monarchies everywhere.

In order to manipulate representations of Christophe to contribute to this anti-monarchical discourse, the Register looked to assert both Christophe’s ‘tyrannical’ nature while simultaneously claiming his legitimacy as a monarchical sovereign. A number of reports published by the Register often painted a picture of Christophe as an irrational, vengeful and tyrannical monarch with the “fury of a tyger”.\textsuperscript{81} But, for the Register, the Haitian monarchy was not a site of exceptional cruelty; rather, it was an insight into the commonplace world of monarchical tyranny. The Register reported that, under the Haitian monarchy, the “people are wretched—greviously oppressed. His word is law. His nod is fate” and King Christophe “claims both people and territory as his own property”.\textsuperscript{82} But at the same time such reports asserted Christophe’s legitimacy and that he had “an equal right to exclaim with Lear: “I’m every inch a king”. In the face of continuing reluctance of European countries—as well as America—to

\textsuperscript{79} Niles’ Weekly Register, 4 January 1817.  
\textsuperscript{80} Niles’ Weekly Register, 19 November 1816.  
\textsuperscript{81} Niles’ Weekly Register, 12 October 1816.  
\textsuperscript{82} Niles’ Weekly Register, 13 June 1818.
recognise his imperial title, Christophe had “a right to maintain his dignity as any” and ultimately he was “more truly a legitimate king than three fourths of them”.83 The idea that the Haitian monarchy’s claim to sovereignty was in fact “much better founded...than many of those who have subscribed to the ‘holy league’” was a constant theme in the Register at this time.84 Other reports drew on parallels between the Queen of Haiti and Princess Charlotte of Britain, and asked readers of the Register to determine “whether the Haytian Queen or the heir apparent of the British throne, exceeds in splendour”.85 However, when these reports asserted that “None of the European legitimates surpasses him in the most princely qualities”, the purpose was not only to present Christophe as a social and political ‘other’ to the citizens of the early American republic but simultaneously as an “equal” to the tyrannical monarchs and emperors of the Old World.86

American Defences of King Christophe

By the time that reports such as the ones found in Niles’s Register were being circulated, Christophe would have undoubtedly been aware of the increasingly negative press in America relating to his character and his kingdom. Similarly, aware of the power of the American press in attempting to foster support for the recognition of the sovereignty of the kingdom of northern Haiti, Christophe’s secretary—Pompée Valentin Vastey—set about publishing a number of pamphlets and books that were designed to defend passionately both the Haitian Revolution and Christophe’s regime. Vastey was a mulatto Haitian, educated in France and who became known as “the most prominent voice of post-independence Haiti”.87 Much has been said elsewhere asserting the significance of Vastey’s writing, which was often and purposefully circulated among

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83 Niles’ Weekly Register, 22 November 1817; 30 May 1818.
84 Niles’ Weekly Register, 22 November 1817.
85 Niles’ Weekly Register, 22 June 1816.
86 Niles’ Weekly Register, 13 June 1818.
American and European audiences. And, as a number of scholars have observed, most of Vastey's writings contained defences and justifications of both Christophe’s reign and his adoption of a monarchical government. In particular, Doris Garraway has argued that Vastey’s defence of Haiti’s monarchical system was “an attempt to argue for its belonging within the modern Atlantic world”. Vastey wrote against the racist depictions of Christophe and his court and attached this fear to a prevailing and ruling ideology of “white privilege” and the fear of a black king. He defended the adoption of monarchy as the only suitable form of government for Haiti and he simultaneously criticised republicanism as an unstable form of governance—as seen in the allegedly chaotic republic of Pétion. As Marlene Daut observes, these writings were important not just for European audiences but also to an American one largely scathing of Old World monarchies and any imitation of them. Vastey clearly saw the importance of justifying Christophe’s mode of government in order to secure approval from British and American audiences that would then hopefully transfer into support for Haitian recognition. Daut also claims that this was largely successful in America as northern newspapers “began internalizing Vastey’s own understanding of the meaning of Haitian independence for the [Western] hemisphere”. Certainly, as Daut asserts, American newspapers appeared to be more supportive of Christophe’s monarchy from 1816—possibly because of a

88 Vastey has been the subject of an increasing amount of scholarly work in recent years. A recently translated version of his scathing assessment of colonialism also contains a number of insightful essays on the significance of his writing: Chris Bongie, The Colonial System Unveiled (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014). Although this text was never published in English, three of Vastey’s later texts were: Reflexions on the Blacks and Whites: Remarks Upon a Letter Addressed by M. Mazeres, … to J.S.L. Sismonde de Sismondi (London: F. B. Wright, 1817); Political Remarks on Some French Works and Newspapers Concerning Hayti (London: n.p., 1818); An Essay on the Causes of the Revolution and Civil Wars of Hayti, Being a Sequel to the Political Remarks Upon Certain French Publications and Journals Concerning Hayti (Exeter: Western Luminary Office, 1823). For an overview of the circulation of these texts in both Britain and America, and Vastey’s defences of the Haitian monarchy within these texts, see: Daut, ""Alpha and Omega’’;” Garraway, "Empire of Freedom;” Fanning, "Early Black Nationalism,” 70-71.

89 Garraway, "Empire of Freedom,” 5.

90 Daut, ""Alpha and Omega’’,” 56.

91 Ibid., 57.
growing awareness among American audiences of Vastey’s work. However, Doris Garraway claims that there is in fact little evidence of detailed, sustained engagement with Vastey’s work in American newspapers until after his death in 1820. Whether Americans immediately “internalised” Vastey’s arguments or not, what is clear is that despite the negative and resentful reporting of publications, such as Niles’s *Weekly Register*, Christophe certainly found pockets of support during the mid-1810s.

From 1816 reports began to emerge in American newspapers that tried to counter the claims that Christophe was the epitome of monarchical tyranny. Such reports would have strengthened calls for the American government to formally recognise the Haitian state—something which, in turn, would help to secure and promote the commercial interests of American merchants. Reports of Christophe thus claimed that the Haitian king was “at peace with the world”.92 Newspapers such as the *American Beacon* spoke directly to the derision of Christophe based on his title by claiming that both governments of Haiti sat comfortably side by side, and that both Christophe and Pétion practised “the axiom of the poet: ‘For forms of government lets fools contest / That which is best administered is best’”.93 The extent of Christophe’s tyranny was questioned by reports of his “shrewd and judicious” form of governing. While there were concessions to the “imperfections” of his government, reports stressed the need that “some allowance” needed to be made because of the “heterogeneous nature of those materials which he has had to mould into order and subordination”.94 These reports instead focused on Christophe’s “achievements” and the “progress” Haiti had made under his leadership. It was said that Christophe was “wisely providing for the civilization and improvement of his country”, that he had been “very liberal in his patronage of science” and that he had “richly endowed a number of seminaries and public schools”.95 For newspapers such as the *Albany Gazette*, Christophe’s endeavours to fortify Haiti’s defences, to

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92 *Hampden Federalist*, 7 March 1816.
93 *American Beacon*, 27 June 1818.
94 *Albany Gazette*, 17 July 1817.
95 *Hallowell Gazette*, 24 February 1818; 1 July 1818.
educate all Haitians (including, importantly, children), and his supposed successes in implementing law and order in Haiti offered a direct contrast to the “chaos” found in Europe. According to the *Gazette*, France was “environed by hostile armies”, while England was the site of constant “tumults and riots”. And while “these disgraceful events” were “marking the history of the present day in those governments”, Americans apparently “read of no outrages, no riots” in Christophe’s Haiti — leading one newspaper to wonder: “Would not the government of France shrink from a comparison with the government of Hayti?”

Alongside reports of education and military defences in Haiti flourishing under Christophe, other accounts asserted more directly the commercial stability and opportunities found in Haiti. Newspapers claimed that “[c]ommerce and the culture of the soil was improving in his dominions” and that, as a result, the Haitian economy was in such a prosperous state that Christophe could “show more money than the Bank of England”. American readers were told: “The commerce of the world [France excepted] is invited to [Haiti’s] luxuriant shores”. These same reports attested to the growing ease with which merchants would be able to conduct business with a population that was being educated in English, as well as French, “for commercial and political purposes”. Some newspapers sought to neutralise memories of the 1804 massacres by reporting that in Haiti “whites are [as] equally protected and respected as the men of colour”. Even *Niles’ Weekly Register* demonstrated the multiplicity of Haiti’s political value by publishing — at the same time of its denunciations of Christophe’s monarchical title — reports that claimed a white person could travel in Haiti “with as much security as I could have done in any part of Great Britain”. Such reports were direct responses to accounts of Christophe’s alleged contempt of American merchants — a claim that was exacerbated by

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96 *Albany Gazette*, 10 April 1817.  
97 *Hampden Federalist*, 7 1816; *Hallowell Gazette*, 1 July 1818.  
98 *American Beacon*, 27 June 1818.  
99 *Hallowell Gazette*, 1 July 1818.  
100 Ibid.  
101 *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 12 October 1816.
stories of Americans being hanged by the Haitian king that emerged by the beginning of 1816.\textsuperscript{102} As long as foreign merchants abided by Haitian laws (which were “equitable”, “founded on the basis of justice” and “rigidly” enforced) and paid their taxes (which were “reasonable”) then Haiti was a site of commercial opportunity and safety because although Haitians were “resolved to live free or perish”, they were equally “desirous to live in friendship with all men”.\textsuperscript{103}

Such allusions to the peaceful and secure nature of Christophe’s kingdom would have supported the call for the American government to formally recognise Haiti—recognition that would lead to better conditions in which American merchants could operate. Within such positive depictions, the question of Christophe’s legitimacy as political sovereign and his position in relation to other Atlantic world leaders played a significant role. Newspapers such as the *Albany Gazette* aligned Christophe with the post-revolutionary leaders of Latin America and questioned why editors around the country were “enlisted in favour of the pretended patriots of South America” and yet “the hand of friendship and assistance” was not extended to their “brethren of St. Domingo”.\textsuperscript{104} The *Gazette* claimed that by denying Haiti’s agency, this was a direct affront to the American maxim of equality among all men. The report suggested that this approach to Haiti was indicative of hypocrisy in the reporting of American politics and particularly in allusions to the meaning of ‘republicanism’. Although both “Christophe and Petion rebelled against that monster ‘Legitimacy’”, the paper decried the lack of support from their republican neighbours and it concluded by suggesting that the silence among America’s newspapers on the subject came from the fact that “St. Domingo at the time of the rebellion, belonged to the father of republicanism, Bonaparte—and having remained silent upon the subject so

\textsuperscript{102} *National Intelligencer*, 30 January 1816.
\textsuperscript{103} *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 12 October 1816; *American Beacon*, 27 June 1818.
\textsuperscript{104} As will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter, it is important to note that the revolutions of Spanish America were largely supported in America by the mid-1810s, though Haiti was often excluded from such celebrations: Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 87.
long, they are now ashamed to agitate it”.

As observed by the Gazette, the reluctance of American newspapers to frame Haiti’s struggle for independence within celebrations of the independent movements in South America most likely stemmed from “the circumstance of their skin being a shade or two darker than that of the Spaniards”. Other reports supported the stance of the Gazette by stating: “if we open a negociation [sic], it must be on a footing as we would establish with any other nation”.

Although these kinds of reports were rare, they demonstrated a willingness among some observers to situate Haiti directly alongside the other trading nations of the Atlantic world. These commentaries sought to distance the Haitian king from reports that aligned him with the monarchs of the Old World by framing him within discussions that celebrated the revolutionary leaders of Latin America. Such depictions in turn called on memories of America’s own revolutionary past and the struggles of its leaders to establish independence in the hostile political world of the Atlantic. Christophe’s titles and the apparent legitimacy of these were, therefore, a constant point of contention in America throughout his reign. Across the Atlantic, depictions of Christophe and the Haitian monarchy would be similarly dependent on the unique socio-political domestic conditions in Britain and would be equally contentious and contradictory in their nature.

British Receptions of President Christophe

From the end of Dessalines’s reign, British newspapers reported on the struggle for power between Christophe and Pétion and emphasised the perceived chaos that was enveloping the new nation. Central to these reports were assertions that the instability in Haiti was evidence of the political dystopia found in post-revolutionary societies more generally. The Salisbury and Winchester Journal, for

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105 *Albany Gazette*, 2 December 1817.
106 *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 22 November 1817.
107 See for example *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 March 1807; *Hull Packet*, 7 April 1807.
example, saw the fighting as proof of the unstable and volatile nature of post-revolutionary states, leading to the conclusion that such bloodshed was to be expected from governments “founded on such principles and hastily put together”.\textsuperscript{108} The news that Christophe had taken charge of northern Haiti and the publication of his constitution only a few months later prompted a similar reaction from the \textit{Caledonian Mercury}. The \textit{Mercury} judged that this new constitution “seems to be very well in theory” but saw in it a parallel with France in which “so many similar systems were brought forward...all of which looked very well upon paper, but ended in nothing but mischief and misery”. Therefore, the \textit{Mercury} concluded, “the Haytian Constitution is not likely to be more solid and substantial” than any forms of governmental legislation that had been proposed in France. For this newspaper, the political aftermath of the French Revolution had set a precedent that Haiti would surely follow and the examples set in both countries served to strengthen its conviction that “political constitutions of any value are not the creation of the collective wisdom of any one period, but must be the work of time, long experience, and those alterations and improvements which can only result from practice and reflection”. In truly patriotic fashion, for the \textit{Mercury} the best example of a constitution derived from a traditional, permanent and stable form of government was the British model “which has rendered it the admiration of the world”.\textsuperscript{109}

In this context, Haiti’s post-revolutionary status posed a potential risk to Christophe’s early attempts to secure sovereign recognition from the British government and the British public. However, voices which cast doubt on the value or stability of Haiti’s new constitution were soon drowned out by the chorus of acceptance that Christophe generally found in Britain at the beginning of his presidency. Only months after news of his presidential title and new constitution was circulated widely among British news sources, positive depictions of the new Haitian head of state began to emerge.\textsuperscript{110} Newspapers such

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Salisbury and Winchester Journal}, 30 March 1807.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, 8 June 1807.
\textsuperscript{110} See for example, \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, 1 June 1807; \textit{Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser}, 6 June 1807.
as the *Morning Chronicle* reported stories of "President Christophe", the “humane Chief” whose status was such that volunteers reportedly swore to “live and die by him”.\(^{111}\) Other newspapers enthusiastically published reports reputedly sent direct from Haiti that described Christophe as the “friend of humanity, the man who loves his country and who obeys its laws”.\(^{112}\) While this level of enthusiasm for the president was hardly abundant, British newspapers at this time generally did seem to accept Haiti’s new leader and routinely referred to the president in a respectful, albeit restrained, manner. Therefore, reports that addressed Christophe in this way are evidence that some observers were anxious to see the new Haitian leader treated with a certain amount of respect and dignity and, perhaps more importantly, with recognition of his political legitimacy.\(^{113}\)

At the heart of a number of respectful depictions of Haiti’s new leader was the potential of a prosperous trading relationship between Britain and the Haitian state. Julia Gaffield’s work has highlighted the fact that in the early years of Christophe’s leadership Britain remained Haiti’s best hope of establishing a prosperous commercial relationship—a relationship that the Haitian government hoped would evolve into official recognition of Haiti’s sovereignty from the British government. However, as Gaffield demonstrates, despite the best efforts of Christophe and British merchants, British ministers were unwilling to formally recognise the Haitian state. Despite this, Britain allowed trading with Haiti to continue and British merchants continued to agitate for official diplomatic recognition from the British government in order to better protect the commercial interests that existed in Haiti and to better promote the prospect of future commercial endeavours with the young Haitian state.\(^{114}\) As a part of this early campaign to promote trade, a number of newspapers clearly

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\(^{111}\) *Morning Chronicle*, 2 September 1807.

\(^{112}\) This same report was published in *Morning Post*, 1 January 1808; *Caledonian Mercury*, 4 January 1808.

\(^{113}\) It is worth noting that depictions at this time also tended to refer to the “rebel” and “cannibal” Pétion—often amidst rumours that he would soon strike up a trade agreement with Napoleon. See for example, *Morning Post*, 1 January 1808; *Caledonian Mercury*, 4 January 1808.

\(^{114}\) Gaffield, *Haitian Connections*, 155-175.
saw the need to present Christophe as a fair and viable political leader—and, importantly, one who was particularly biased towards Britain and her commercial interests.

A number of British newspapers therefore looked to legitimise the Haitian president in their promotion of trade with the Haitian state. The Morning Post, for example, predicted that news of Christophe’s apparent openness to trade with commercial nations would be positively received by its readers. The Post printed reports written by members of Christophe’s government that depicted Haiti as a safe place with which to trade.¹¹⁵ At the heart of reports such as these was the idea that Christophe was “decidedly in the interest of England”, as opposed to Pétion who was “supposed to have an understanding with Bonaparte”.¹¹⁶ The story that Christophe was in fact of “British birth” and the fact that his government was “composed of men who have had the honour to serve his British majesty” further strengthened the idea that the northern president was someone with whom the British could, and should, do business.¹¹⁷ The fact that potential trade opportunities were a decisive factor in the depictions of Christophe and his government was best exemplified by the reporting found in the Caledonian Mercury. Where the Mercury had earlier responded with scepticism of Christophe’s government, only a couple of years later its tone changed decidedly. By 1809, the newspaper asserted that the Haitian president possessed “a steady and determined spirit, not elated with success, nor depressed with adversity” and that the “patience and perseverance” of Christophe had instilled “confidence...into the public mind”. The Mercury claimed that “nature” had given Christophe “all those essential qualities of body and mind, which could give vigour and effect to his government”. More than this, the Mercury admitted that its favouritism of Christophe over Pétion was ultimately because they believed it was Christophe who could give the “best guarantee of the British interests in that part of the world”.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Morning Post, 3 September 1807; 19 April 1808.
¹¹⁶ Ipswich Journal, 23 April 1808.
¹¹⁷ Caledonian Mercury, 20 June 1807.
¹¹⁸ Caledonian Mercury, 3 April 1809.
reversal from the early doubts of the *Mercury* of the permanency and value of Christophe’s first constitution. Instead, the newspaper now published proclamations of the Haitian president, including Christophe’s speech in celebration of the anniversary of Haitian independence in 1809—a speech which the *Mercury* concluded would “reflect the honour on any statesman”.\(^{119}\)

Only a couple of years after this early positivity, however, British newspapers soon began to paint a very different portrait of the Haitian leader. This shift in perception is again best exemplified by the depictions that began to emerge of Christophe in the pages of the *Caledonian Mercury*. Only a year after its glowing portrait of Christophe the “statesman”, the *Mercury* was soon circulating reports of the “cruel” and “cunning” Haitian president. The Haitian government was now “despotic” and “Christophe’s word is a law”. The *Mercury* claimed that such was his tyranny, “when a criminal is brought before him...he orders him to be bayoneted on the spot”. By the end of 1810, the *Mercury* would print reports from Haiti that even went so far to claim that Christophe had passed orders for Haitian troops to completely wipe out the coloured population of the country.\(^{120}\)

In this period, Christophe’s image was also re-constructed by other newspapers and presented to the British public not as the “humane chief” but as the “rapacious” and “cruel” “Pirate”.\(^{121}\) This reversion to negative depictions of the Haitian leader demonstrates how quickly British perceptions of Christophe could shift in the early years of his rule.

A major factor in this increase in negativity towards Christophe within British newspapers was the emergence of stories that Christophe had seized American vessels and was treating merchants unfavourably and dishonourably. For example, the *Morning Post*—which, like the *Caledonian Mercury* had largely been receptive to Christophe until this point—now circulated reports from American newspapers of Christophe seizing American ships and coercing American sailors “into his service” and that he “strips and lacerates them and resorts to every

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\(^{119}\) *Caledonian Mercury*, 8 April 1809.  
\(^{120}\) *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 June 1810; 26 November 1810.  
\(^{121}\) *Morning Post*, 18 July 1810.
violence which a ferocious tyrant can invent or inflict”.\textsuperscript{122} The \textit{Caledonian Mercury} published similar stories titled “The Black Emperor of Hayti”—taken from the American press—that detailed the “contempt” with which Christophe apparently treated American merchants.\textsuperscript{123} Some years later British newspapers would revel in Christophe’s apparently preferential treatment of British merchants over Americans but at this point in time they seemed alarmed at the political autonomy and even superiority that Christophe’s seizing of the vessels represented. Only one year earlier the \textit{Mercury} anticipated that Haiti and Britain would form a mutually beneficial commercial alliance.\textsuperscript{124} However, by 1810 the \textit{Mercury} had published a letter from Haiti which warned that “these blacks would give themselves airs if we would allow them”—therefore speculating that Haiti and Christophe were now operating independently to best serve their own interests.\textsuperscript{125} Although Christophe’s actions were against American merchants, they seemed to fuel fears of a black autonomous leader operating in the Atlantic—and, importantly, one operating under conditions that threatened both British commercial interests as well as the established racial hierarchy of Atlantic world politics.

Central to these denunciations of Christophe was a strategy that British observers had used against Dessalines some years earlier. By the 1810s, newspapers began to align Christophe with Napoleon to highlight the ‘threat’ that these new, illegitimate leaders of post-revolutionary states posed to British commercial interests. Newspapers such as the \textit{Morning Post} claimed that “CHRISTOPHE follows the example of NAPOLEON” in his seizure of the American vessels.\textsuperscript{126} As with Dessalines, the situating of Christophe as a threatening ‘Other’—along with Napoleon—relied on his political title. In this context, British newspapers began to more regularly attach the “Emperor” label to Christophe to frame him within this denunciation of post-revolutionary governance.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, 29 October 1810.  
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, 3 April 1809.  
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, 28 June 1810.  
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
Christophe was said to imitate “his brother NAPOLEAN [sic]” in the creation of lords and dukes and in the opulence of his government. In reports of the ongoing conflict with Pétion’s and Christophe’s attempts to take over the whole of Haiti, Christophe’s supposed thirst for expansion was rather dramatically aligned with that of Napoleon’s. Some reports even went so far as to place Napoleon’s words directly in the mouth of the Haitian leader: “Christophe, imitating the language of another Emperor, gave out he intended to eat his Christmas dinner at Port au Prince!” This alignment thus helped to reinforce the continuing British media campaign against Napoleon by asserting Christophe’s legitimacy alongside that of the French emperor. Essentially, both leaders reinforced the other’s illegitimacy. But, as with British depictions of Dessalines some years earlier, these representations also demonstrated a fear that Haiti’s own post-revolutionary leader could go down the same path of destruction and conquest as his imperial ‘brother’—a path that could be disastrous to British commercial interests in the Caribbean.

**British Reactions to the Emergence of a New World King**

As in America, when news emerged of the coronation of a black king in the Caribbean—and one who apparently styled himself on the British sovereign—British newspapers did not react favourably to this supposed imitation of monarchy. If one of Christophe’s prime intentions to create a hereditary monarchy was to increase his popularity in Britain in order to secure diplomatic recognition of Haiti and to promote favourable trade agreements, this initially backfired in the British press. Newspapers reported on Christophe’s coronation with a sinister mocking tone at the “spectacle” of a black monarchy as

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127 *Morning Post*, 6 May 1811.
128 *Chester Chronicle*, 1 February 1811. Port au Prince was the capital of Pétion’s southern republic. This comment alluded to Napoleon’s conquest of Vienna by Christmas of 1805, thereby suggesting that Christophe would follow Napoleon’s lead and look to consolidate his power in the Americas.
129 For discussions of how Christophe constructed a regal image—largely to secure support from the British government—see: Racine, "Britannia’s Bold Brother,” 127-132; McIntosh and Pierrot, "Henry I," 138-142.
they sneered at the “sable monarch”. In reports such as these Christophe’s blackness and ex-slave status reduced him to a primal and volatile figure who was said to be “thirsting after the baubles of regal splendour”, Others saw Christophe’s imperial title as an affront to the respectability of the traditional form of monarchy on which Britain had been built. For example, the loyalist York Herald declared that Christophe’s adoption of monarchical practices was initially “amusing enough” but much more serious for the newspaper was when “this would-be-Sovereign had the audacity to rise up, and drink to—’His Brother the King of Great Britain.’” In the years after news of his coronation had been well documented, a number of newspapers refused to acknowledge his monarchical title by referring instead to “the self-created Emperor Christophe”, Rumours of his death—no doubt taken from American newspapers—emerged as some publications apparently wished for “an end to the Imperial Government of St. Domingo, and its sable Dukes, Count Marshals &c.”

The rhetoric found in reports such as these and the lack of positive reactions to his coronation certainly point to a reluctance among the British press to conceive of and accept a black monarch, and at times these reports directly expressed indignation at the subversion of racial hierarchy that the Haitian monarchy represented. As with British depictions of Dessalines, however, these reports cannot be read only through the prism of a British ‘fear’ of the presence of a black imperial sovereign. They also need to be considered in conjunction with the anxieties of a British population that continued to debate the concept of legitimate political rule—a debate that had been sparked by the upheaval of traditional hierarchies throughout Europe and the formidable rise of Napoleon. Post-revolutionary forms of power and newly created governments continued to threaten the conservative old order of hereditary monarchies and the ideologies on which they were based. As a result, Christophe—the illiterate ex-slave who

130 Liverpool Mercury, 21 February 1812.
131 York Herald, 7 September 1811.
132 A number of newspapers at this time made reference to Christophe’s self-created status: see for example Bury and Norwich Post, 26 June 1811; Caledonian Mercury, 7 January 1813.
133 Caledonian Mercury, 7 January 1813.
had risen to control the wealthiest colony in the New World—was often derided as part of a more general loyalist narrative aimed at denying agency or legitimacy to these new forms of power. In other words, Christophe’s blackness, rather than being the reason for these negative depictions, became for some observers a tool with which to deride post-revolutionary leaders in general, particularly those who dared to claim an imperial title.

While critical discourses such as these sat comfortably within British loyalist narratives, it is important to note that support for the Haitian monarchy from British radicals was surprisingly absent at this stage. Radical publishers in the 1810s such as William Cobbett defended Napoleon’s claims to legitimacy and openly questioned whether hereditary succession was the sole basis for truly legitimate governance.\(^{134}\) Therefore, where one would have expected depictions of the Haitian king being used to further question the concepts of legitimacy and hereditary rule, radical publications were in fact largely quiet about the Haitian monarchy during the Regency. Perhaps radicals thought it best to avoid the issue of a post-revolutionary society apparently choosing to style itself on the very monarchy they opposed. Either way, the value that the presence of the Haitian monarchy could in fact hold for anti-monarchists could be seen in a rare, but significant, moment of early support for Christophe and his monarchy printed in Leigh and John Hunt’s weekly publication, *The Examiner*. The Hunt brothers—well-known critics of George III and the Prince Regent—published numerous articles that reflected their belief that “it is no disparagement to a king to say he does not possess wisdom, for wise kings appear much seldomer than comets”.\(^{135}\) *The Examiner* had previously publicly lambasted those who had participated so enthusiastically in the 1809 celebrations of George III’s jubilee.\(^{136}\) And they soon used news of the newly crowned King of Haiti to suggest that this new monarchy was preferable to the archaic and repressive dynasties of Britain and Europe.

\(^{134}\) Semmel, *Napoleon and the British*, 182-183.
\(^{135}\) *The Examiner*, 4 March 1810.
\(^{136}\) Colley, "Apotheosis of George III," 122.
In an article that appeared only months after Christophe's coronation, the *Examiner* addressed the “new forms of government, of kingdoms and of empires” that the newspaper believed were occurring with so much regularity that they should be treated with “as much indifference as the plan of a new insurance office”. The glaring exception to this, according to the *Examiner*, was the new Haitian kingdom, which presented images of “opening prosperity, of a young and promising intelligence, instead of a dying and repentant one”. The *Examiner* was certainly not overly-enthusiastic at the adoption of monarchy—“a creation not very consistent with our better notions of liberty”—but the newspaper defended this form of government in Haiti as “naturally resulting” from Haiti’s chaotic past and its relative “infancy”. Writing against denunciations of Christophe’s imperial title in British newspapers, the *Examiner* praised Christophe for the “sound sense” of the adoption of “common royalty” and for foregoing “the vanity of calling himself Emperor”. With the aid of this leader at the helm, the *Examiner* concluded, “the people of Hayti may well be regarded as creating a new aera [sic] both in the political and intellectual history of mankind”.\(^{137}\) For *The Examiner* then, Christophe’s Haiti represented an opportunity to implement a form of monarchical rule that would be more progressive and conducive to its people than the hereditary dynasties and self-created emperors of Europe.

**Abolitionists and the Troubling Agency of King Christophe**

Despite the praise and optimism of the Hunt brothers’ *Examiner*, such defences of Christophe’s monarchical title would remain in the minority for the first few years of the existence of the Haitian monarchy. However, as scholars have highlighted, British representations of Christophe increased exponentially in both volume and positivity from the mid-1810s.\(^{138}\) The main reason for this is often claimed to be the relationship that flourished in this period between British abolitionists and the Haitian Kingdom. In 1814, Christophe set about trying to improve his popularity in Britain and further his cause for diplomatic

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\(^{137}\) *The Examiner*, 29 September 1811.

\(^{138}\) Geggus, "Haiti and the Abolitionists," 121-123; Racine, "Britannia’s Bold Brother," 128-130.
recognition by the British government. Logically, Christophe thought his most receptive and sympathetic audience would be the British abolitionists and copies of his proclamations and other state papers were printed in English and sent to William Wilberforce as part of the Haitian king’s propaganda campaign. Christophe also solicited the opinion of Thomas Clarkson—another leading member of the British abolition movement—and similarly sent a number of papers relating to Haitian laws and state procedures. The enthusiastic response of Clarkson and, to a lesser extent, Wilberforce meant that the Haitian king and the British abolitionists began a period of correspondence that would last until Christophe’s death in 1820. In this time, Clarkson sent numerous letters to Christophe advising him on the best way to implement progressive changes to the Haitian state—particularly on matters relating to education and religion. Abolitionists sent books, teachers and education advisers to Haiti to assist Christophe in his plans to implement an education system accessible to all members of Haitian society—a plan that Christophe eventually implemented with remarkable success. Wilberforce, meanwhile, also wrote to Christophe to similarly offer advice on the best way forward for Haiti as well as trying to persuade volunteers to travel to Haiti to ensure education, agriculture and religion were all furthered and improved.

The work of historians such as David Geggus has shown how Haiti became “a crucial test case for ideas about race and about the future of colonial slavery” for British abolitionists. Abolitionist publications reflected this renewed interest in Haiti and responded positively to Christophe’s overtures in the 1810s as they

139 For more information on Christophe’s plans for education in Haiti and the help he solicited from British abolitionists for assistance with these plans, see Karen Racine, "Imported Englishness: Henry Christophe’s Educational Program in Haiti, 1806-1820," in Imported Modernity in Post-Colonial State Formation: The Appropriation of Political, Educational, and Cultural Models in Nineteenth-Century Latin America, edited by Eugenia Roldán Vera and Marcelo Caruso (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 205-230.

140 The correspondence between Clarkson and other abolitionists with Christophe and his aides can be seen in Earl Leslie Griggs and Clifford Holmes Prator, Henry Christophe & Thomas Clarkson: A Correspondence (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

141 Geggus, "Haiti and the Abolitionists," 114.
depicted the apparent progress found in Haiti as proof of the capability for the moral improvement of a post-slave society. But reports such as these were often framed within self-congratulatory narratives that praised the impact of the British abolitionists on Haiti and rarely alluded to the agency of Christophe in Haiti’s progress. In public, the kinds of books and pamphlets by supporters of abolition that were produced about Toussaint Louverture some years previously were never constructed for Christophe. James Stephen even chose to edit and republish his ‘history’ of Toussaint Louverture in 1814 rather than engage with the current leader of the Haitian state. In doing so, Stephen replaced Christophe’s agency and political autonomy with the memory of the venerated—but, crucially, the deceased—epitome of black capability. Likewise, whereas Wilberforce privately claimed to pray for the Haitian king on a daily basis, he at the same time instructed fellow abolitionists to “keep Haiti in the background” until it was better able to “stand on its own two legs”—this in itself a telling indicator of how much credit Wilberforce was willing to give to Christophe and his advisers for Haiti’s progress as an independent state. It seems that if British abolitionist identity largely relied upon Britain’s status as the enlightened ‘big brother’ to the black slaves and freemen of the Caribbean, Christophe’s monarchical title and his autonomous agency severely complicated this image. As a result, the Haitian monarch was relegated to the margins of abolitionist narratives.

142 James Stephen, The History of Toussaint Louverture (London: J. Hatchard, 1814). This was originally published as Buonaparte in the West Indies; or, the History of Toussaint Louverture, the African Hero (London: J. Brettell, 1803).
143 It is worth noting that Stephen apparently planned to write a biography of Christophe, even going so far as to collect materials for the project. But for unknown reasons this never materialised. See Geggus, "Haiti and the Abolitionists," 125.
144 Ibid., 123; 133.
145 Marcus Wood has discussed how the British abolitionists were conscious of their philanthropic image and of the necessity of white agency in the abolitionist campaigns: Marcus Wood, The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 91-100.
146 It is worth noting that Haiti continues to be entirely marginalised in British memorialisation of slavery and abolition today, something that was most evident in the British celebrations of the bicentenary of the 1807 Slave Trade Act.
The reason for abolitionists’ trepidation at overtly or enthusiastically supporting the Haitian king is perhaps best exemplified in an anti-abolition pamphlet that emerged in 1816 and would be widely distributed and discussed in both British and American newspapers. Joseph Marryat—a London merchant, Member of Parliament for Sandwich and an agent for Grenada—published a pamphlet that was designed to offer a rebuttal to perceived attacks made against him by abolitionists and, in particular, by James Stephen. Marryat was an important mouthpiece for West Indian planters and earlier in 1816 he had published his *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*—a publication that was the focus of much criticism and derision by abolitionists. In his second pamphlet—*More Thoughts*—Marryat sought to defend his original ideas on the folly of abolishing slavery in the British colonies while simultaneously offering the same kind of character assassination to British abolitionists to which he believed he had been subjected. A central part of this attack on the abolitionist group was the assistance and support they had given—and continued to give—the Haitian monarchy.\footnote{Joseph Marryat, *More Thoughts, Occasioned by Two Publications Which the Authors Call "an Exposure of Some of the Numerous Mis-Statements and Misrepresentations Contained in a Pamphlet, Commonly Known by the Name of Mr. Marryat’s Pamphlet, Entitled Thoughts, &c." And "a Defence of the Bill for the Registration of Slaves"* (London: J. Ridgway, 1816). News of the pamphlet also found its way into American newspapers. See *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 29 August 1816; *New York Courier*, 2 September 1816.}

In *More Thoughts*, Christophe’s monarchical status was pivotal to Marryat’s scathing attack on the abolitionists. Marryat described a supposed meeting among the abolitionists and the “friends of the African and Asiatic Society” at a London tavern.\footnote{Maryatt, *More Thoughts*, 99.} The meeting was advertised in British newspapers in March 1816 and Marryat’s account of the meeting was published soon after. Three years later Maryatt’s son would employ George Cruikshank to etch a satirical interpretation of the event. The print evokes the chaos that Maryatt imagined in...
his 1816 pamphlet and has been aptly described by Temi Odumosu as a “visually arresting display of coarsely rendered caricatures, representing its subjects as lewd, misshapen, and unruly”.149 Key to Maryatt and Cruikshank’s criticism of the meeting was the alleged celebration of the King of Haiti by British abolitionists. And as Odumosu has argued, Maryatt was particularly scathing of the idea that the British abolitionists would assert Christophe’s legitimacy as a monarch.150

Figure 2. British Museum, BM Satires number 13249, George Cruikshank, The New Union Club (1819).

Maryatt placed Stephen at centre stage of this meeting as he outlined “a panegyric upon Christophe” by the British abolitionist. Marryat was particularly scathing of Stephen’s attempts to “vindicate” Christophe from accusations of vanity and a desire for the trappings of monarchy—a claim often made in

150 Ibid., 345.
negative depictions of Christophe and one asserted by Marryat in his pamphlet.\textsuperscript{151} But for Marryatt, more damning than this was Stephen's alleged belief that "King Henry of Hayti, the name by which he always spoke of this person...derived his title from a more legitimate source than the monarchs of Europe". According to Marryat: "This broad assertion was afterwards somewhat qualified by particularizing the Ex-Emperor of France, and the Kings of Spain and Naples; and contrasting their rights to the "golden circle". In the pamphlet, Stephen apparently not only supported Christophe but the Haitian monarch was his "immaculate favourite" as the reader was undoubtedly led to believe Stephen even favoured the Haitian king over the British monarch. Although at the beginning of the meeting toasts to the British monarchy were drunk “but, \textit{without rising from their seats}”, a toast to Christophe—drank later in the meeting—was said to be drank with “the \textit{whole company standing, with three times three, and enthusiastic acclamations}”.\textsuperscript{152} Whether true or not—and whether alcohol had played a role in this increased enthusiasm or not—Maryatt saw the differences in the two toasts as evidence of where abolitionist supporters’ allegiances truly rested.

The idea that British abolitionists asserted Christophe’s legitimacy alongside and even possibly above the claims of the British sovereign was more serious than to simply “belittle” anti-slavery figures such as Wilberforce.\textsuperscript{153} This was a damning attack on the abolitionists and Stephen in particular—one that was borderline treasonous. Marryat’s speculation that abolitionists displayed an allegiance for the Haitian monarchy over the British king led to the conclusion that the “doctrine of legitimacy laid down by Mr. Stephen on this occasion, is certainly not calculated for the meridian of the Congress of Vienna; nor even such as Mr. Wilberforce would have ventured to broach, at one of his visits to the Prince Regent”.\textsuperscript{154} The fear that support for Christophe’s monarchical status could be interpreted by political opponents as an indictment of the British monarchy at

\textsuperscript{151} Marryat, \textit{More Thoughts}, 102, 107-108.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 100-102.
\textsuperscript{153} Odumosu, "Abolitionists, African Diplomats," 345.
\textsuperscript{154} Marryat, \textit{More Thoughts}, 106.
this time could very well explain the reluctance by British political supporters of Christophe to publicly speak in favour of him. Marryat overtly suggested that support for the sovereignty of the Haitian monarchy pointed to an element of radicalism in abolitionist politics from which abolitionists would have wanted to distance themselves. Stephen’s supposed support for his “hero” Christophe even apparently extended to the prediction that “the new black dynasty will in no distant time, subvert the relations of the western world”.\footnote{Ibid., 120.} By placing support for political upheaval and subversion throughout the Western hemisphere in the mouth of Stephen, Marryat directly associated support for Christophe with a political radicalism that even sympathisers of Haiti would have found difficult to uphold. Marryat’s attack is a good indicator of the kinds of criticisms that abolitionists were wary of and wanted to avoid, and perhaps answers why they themselves presented indifference to the volatile—and potentially damaging—subject of Christophe’s legitimacy.

The Haitian Monarchy and British Perceptions of Legitimacy

Although abolitionists may have been unwilling to assert Christophe’s legitimacy as a monarch explicitly, they would have undoubtedly been aware of the importance of such questions if Haiti was to gain the support from Britain that abolitionists knew would be so vital to its progress. As a result, abolitionists encouraged displays of Christophe’s legitimacy without necessarily discussing it themselves. One good example of this was a painting by Richard Evans of \textit{His Majesty Henry Christophe, King of Hayti}, which was displayed at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1818. The painting was a gift from Christophe to Wilberforce and it was most likely displayed to the public at the behest of the abolitionists, although this was not made explicit at the time.\footnote{For discussions of this painting see McCrea, “Portrait Mythology?,” 66-68; McIntosh and Pierrot, “Henry I,” 138-141. Both McCrea and McIntosh note that the painting was most likely commissioned by Christophe himself and it therefore demonstrates an acute awareness of the need to project an image of himself as a ‘legitimate’ king.} The abolitionists were also almost certainly responsible for the publication and circulation of
three of Baron de Vastey’s texts while Christophe was alive—texts which not only passionately defended Haiti’s sovereignty but also asserted the legitimacy of the Haitian monarch. Vastey’s texts, Evans’s painting and the circulation of Christophe’s numerous proclamations and manifestos were crucial performances of the legitimacy of the Haitian monarchy. But, importantly, these were performances that allowed abolitionists to publicly keep their distance from the Haitian king.

Figure 3. Musée du Panthéon National, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Richard Evans, *Henry Christophe, King of Haiti*, (c. 1816-1818).

Recent scholarly attention has begun to highlight the significance of Vastey’s texts, including his defences of the Haitian monarchy. But an even more direct defence of the monarchy’s legitimacy had already been circulating in Britain before Vastey’s came to light: Prince Saunders’s *Haytian Papers* published in

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Prince Saunders was a well-educated, free African-American who taught in, and established, schools for African-Americans in Massachusetts. In 1815, Saunders arrived in England in order to establish better links with and assistance from British abolitionists. At this time, Wilberforce and Clarkson persuaded Saunders to go to Haiti to provide diplomatic assistance and guidance to Christophe. While in Haiti, Saunders wrote his *Haytian Papers* in order to promote more positive depictions of the Haitian state and of Christophe to a British audience. At the behest of Christophe, and with the encouragement of Thomas Clarkson, the publication of the text coincided with Saunders embarking on a number of speaking tours in Britain, and later the United States, that were designed to promote positive depictions of the Haitian state. Saunders remains a peripheral figure in scholarly discussions regarding Christophe’s Haiti but some studies have highlighted the prominence of Saunders’s writing, particularly for American audiences. In particular, Sara Fanning has demonstrated how Saunders’s *Papers* — and the subsequent speaking tour in America — intended to promote Christophe’s kingdom as a destination for African-American emigrants in the mid to late-1810s. Other historians have traced Saunders’s influence on the implementation of schools in Christophe’s kingdom and how this was used as a source of inspiration for free African-Americans in America to establish similar education systems.

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160 White, “Prince Saunders”, 528.

161 Fanning, "Early Black Nationalism," 72.

While scholars often allude to the British abolitionist influence in the publishing of Sanders’s *Papers*, what is often under-appreciated is the agency of both Saunders and Christophe in the creation of this work. Abolitionists almost certainly would have supported the circulation of a text that painted the Haitian monarch in a positive light. But, crucially, such appraisals were not created by the hand of the abolitionists themselves. Although Saunders had in fact been introduced to Christophe by Wilberforce and Clarkson, the influence of the abolitionists over this text is often over-emphasised in scholarly studies to the point that the agency of a black writer asserting the legitimacy of a black monarchy to a largely white audience is often undermined. Indeed, historians such as David Geggus have written that the abolitionists published the *Haytian Papers* but only “with the help of Prince Saunders”.

However, the creation of such a text suggests that both Christophe and Saunders were acutely aware of the importance of asserting and justifying the Haitian monarch’s legitimacy to a British audience—assertions that were decidedly absent in the public discourses of their abolitionist supporters. Interestingly, in the rare moments when Saunders offers personal commentary on these papers it is often neither to insist directly on diplomatic recognition of Haiti nor is it to promote overtly increased trade between Britain and Haiti. Instead, Saunders uses these moments to justify Christophe’s adoption of monarchy and to insist on the acceptance of him as a legitimate sovereign.

The primary function of Saunders’s *Haytian Papers* was to assert the legitimacy of the Haitian monarch and to highlight the apparently enlightened and liberal forms of governmental policy implemented by King Christophe. Saunders’s text emphasised how Haitians were “blessed with a sovereign” that had the needs of the Haitian people at the heart of his policies and decisions. A considerable section of the *Papers* was devoted to the “Narrative of the Accession of their Royal Majesties to the Throne of Hayti”. In it, readers were told that under Dessalines’s government and immediately after his assassination,

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“[i]nsubordination and licentiousness” were commonplace, “the public treasures were squandered” and that “dark and secret plots” were being conducted throughout the army and the people. However, Christophe—“[g]reat at all times”—was said to be aware of all of these problems and acted swiftly and decisively to counter them for the good of the Haitian people.\(^{165}\) Saunders emphasised the fact that Christophe initially took up a presidential title as he attempted to improve the security of Haiti, as well as improving the schools, hospitals and agricultural practices of the state. However, despite these “good deeds of the government” Saunders presented a picture of a restless, ill-disciplined state under Christophe’s presidency. The repeated use of the presidential title in this part of the text asserted the idea that Christophe at least tried to use this mode of government before the adoption of monarchy—possibly a concession to a British audience which was still unsure whether to be flattered or offended by this imitation of traditional monarchy.

Central to Saunders’s attempts to court British favour was the explanation and justification of Christophe’s adoption of a monarchical title. Even though Christophe apparently acted always in the interests of the people, the threat of internal revolution constantly lingered. Saunders insisted on the “insufficiency” of the presidential title, which the people “had invested him in calamitous times” and that Christophe needed to adopt a title with more authority and power in order to instil the stability and discipline necessary for Haiti’s economic and social improvement—thereby speaking to British loyalist affection for the stability of monarchy.\(^{166}\) The fact that Christophe was a self-created monarch was recognised in Saunders’s writing as Christophe’s adoption of monarchy was depicted as having little to do with the sovereign himself. Rather, “the declared opinion of the most respectable and enlightened citizens was in favour of placing Henry on the throne”. Saunders claimed that the “happy news” of Christophe’s coronation was “received with unbounded transports of affection and joy”\(^{167}\). The portrayal of Christophe as a reluctant monarch and the unbridled joy of

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 57-58.
\(^{166}\) Ibid., 115.
\(^{167}\) Ibid., 115-116.
Haitians at this new of form governance was a conscious effort to write against any negative depictions of a supposedly illegitimate sovereign. Christophe’s title was presented as not only necessary but also deserved due to his bravery in war and his vigorous attempts at improving the welfare of his citizens. Saunders also sought to legitimise Christophe’s nomination by depicting his personal conduct as befitting a traditional monarch. Christophe’s example was one that apparently influenced the “re-establishment of manners” throughout the north of Haiti and reinstalled a sense of order and calm throughout the state. This led Saunders to conclude that Christophe was proof that “good manners are the attendants of good monarchs, and constitute the glory of their reign; as, on the other hand, from licentiousness come bad princes, to the disgrace of their government”. Whether the latter part of this quote was a thinly-veiled swipe at the debauchery of the Prince Regent is impossible to ascertain. But if it were, it would represent an acute awareness on the part of Saunders of the British public’s disdain for the heir to the British throne. And more than this, it demonstrates the significance Saunders placed on the performance of both legitimate and acceptable monarchical forms of rule, particularly for a British audience.

By the time Saunders’s text was published in Britain in 1816, its assertions of the legitimacy of the Haitian monarchy would largely be read by an already-receptive audience. By 1814, positive depictions of Christophe and his agency in Haiti’s progress had already begun to appear in newspapers and periodicals. In an article considering the “Politics of the New World”, the Liverpool Mercury concluded that Christophe demanded respect as a sovereign because it was he who “knows as well as any European governor, what is really beneficial to his people, and feels far more than such a governor would do, that it is his duty to perfect those institutions, that relate so directly to their happiness”. Periodicals such as the New Annual Register would likewise claim that “the measures of this sovereign displayed a wise and enlightened policy” and that his proclamations were “in point of eloquence and force of reasoning...not inferior to

168 Ibid., 112.
169 Liverpool Mercury, 7 October 1814.
the most celebrated state papers of the most eloquent and enlightened nations”. Scholarly work often attributes reports such as these to the influence of British abolitionists. However, while abolitionist support for Christophe undoubtedly had some influence over these depictions, a number of these reports often occurred outside of discussions of abolitionism. In particular, proponents of King Christophe and supporters of his claims to legitimacy emphasised such claims in ways that abolitionists were still reluctant to do in public. But it is particularly important to note that defences of the Haitian monarchy came at a time of increased political stability for Britain and were produced under circumstances that would make praise for a New World monarch more acceptable.

Positive depictions such as these began to emerge more regularly around the time of the European allies’ defeat of Napoleon, the resulting Congress of Vienna, and the signing of treaties that in effect re-established the strength of hereditary monarchical rule throughout Europe. With Britain once again at peace and the superiority of monarchical governance in Europe solidified, assertions of Christophe as a legitimate sovereign would begin to find more sympathetic ears than in previous years. As Stuart Semmel has demonstrated, in the early to mid-1810s the meaning of legitimacy continued to be contended in Britain, particularly in relation to the defeat of Napoleon and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France. Although Napoleon still had sympathisers in Britain, British loyalists celebrated his defeat to the allied forces and defended the legitimacy of hereditary monarchies. While the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France was far from universally applauded in Britain, the reversion to traditional forms of political rule in Europe was largely greeted by loyalists. For example, the British responded favourably to constitutions adopted by

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170 The New Annual Register or General Repository of History, Politics and Literature for the year 1814 (London: J Stockdale, 1815), 280.
171 Semmel, Napoleon and the British, 175-188.
figures such as the new king of the Netherlands—constitutions which had “strong monarchical authority” at their core.\textsuperscript{172}

Perhaps most significantly, despite the increasing unpopularity of the Prince Regent, George III continued to be celebrated in British loyalist discourses as the “glorification” of his monarchy was connected with a sense of national achievement and pride.\textsuperscript{173} The anonymous editor of the \textit{Haytian Papers} seemed to be appealing to the popularity of George III among the British public when he wrote that the “greatest happiness of a nation is that of possessing a wise and valiant King, who knows how to make his rights respected abroad, and who studies the internal administration of his laws with justice and equity”. For the editor, the Haitians possessed such a leader in their “beloved Sovereign”—a sentiment that could perhaps be shared by the \textit{Haytian Papers}’s British audience.\textsuperscript{174} Although Christophe had hitherto presented a challenge to the ideological foundations of legitimacy and hereditary rule, in this new political climate the Haitian king would be re-presented as part of a more general campaign of loyalist narratives that asserted the superiority of monarchical governments.

In this period of stability, a large number of reports were more supportive of Christophe’s legitimacy as a political leader in the Atlantic world. As Macintosh and Pierrot have demonstrated, Christophe was “sophisticated” in the way he attempted to align himself alongside the British monarch.\textsuperscript{175} By the mid-1810s this perceived imitation of the British monarchy in Haiti seemed eventually to have the desired effect as the Haitian monarch was frequently portrayed as a “beloved” monarch responsible for the happiness of the “tranquil” nation.\textsuperscript{176} In these reports, assertions of the virtues of Christophe’s rule fed into narratives that alluded to the merits of monarchical rule more generally. Newspapers such

\textsuperscript{172} Brian E. Vick, \textit{The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 244.
\textsuperscript{173} Colley, “Apotheosis of George III,” 110.
\textsuperscript{174} Saunders, \textit{Haytian Papers}, 192.
\textsuperscript{175} McIntosh and Pierrot, "Henry I," 137.
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Morning Post}, 1 October 1814.
as the *Caledonian Mercury* published reports from Haiti of “His Majesty, who never loses sight of the good of his kingdom and the happiness of his people”—reports which underlined the benefits a king can bring to a nation.\(^{177}\) The *Morning Post* was also responsible for publishing Christophe’s own “Manifesto of the King”—a document intended to assert the Haitian king’s own legitimacy on the Atlantic stage.\(^{178}\) Proclamations from Haiti that praised the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy and aligned Haiti’s monarchy with the dynasties of Europe were also printed.\(^{179}\) The *Morning Post* published stories of Christophe receiving French diplomats “with all the respect due to an Ambassador”—proof that the Haitian monarch performed the duties of a sovereign respectfully.\(^{180}\) Within this new, stable and conservative political climate British newspapers were already framing the Haitian king in a more celebratory narrative of monarchical government—a perfect time for the circulation of such an appraisal of the Haitian monarchy as found in Saunders’ *Haytian Papers*.

Although there is little evidence of reviews of Saunders’s text or engaged discussions of it in British newspapers or periodicals, what is certain is that articles that advocated Christophe’s legitimacy increased in volume and positivity in the same year that the *Haytian Papers* was circulated. In this period newspapers reported with increasing regularity that Christophe was “the pattern of every royal excellence” and that he was determined to make “his kingdom and reign respected for its strength, resources and love of justice”.\(^ {181}\) Such celebrations of Christophe’s monarchy emphasised the sense of paternal care the king apparently had for his subjects—a common point of reference in positive depictions of George III.\(^ {182}\) Reports such as these aimed to place Christophe at the centre of Haiti’s apparent progression, particularly when they recognised that it was the “[s]overeign himself” who “encouraged the foundation

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177 *Caledonian Mercury*, 8 October 1814.
178 *Morning Post*, 7 December 1814.
179 *Morning Post*, 8 December 1814.
180 *Morning Post*, 15 January 1815.
181 *Morning Post*, 13 August 1816.
of schools”. Christophe was presented as an active political agent, and one whose political affairs appeared to be “as well conducted as in the best organised government in the world”. While reflections such as these certainly looked to praise the potential for black capability, more than this they sought to place Haiti and Christophe as viable, rightful and equal sovereign entities on the Atlantic stage. Some depictions went even further to claim that Christophe’s proclamations not only proved black capability but would “put to the blush some of the [w]hite legitimates of the holy alliance, whose main object appears to be, to suppress every trace of that spirit of popular freedom in the old world; which they see with such alarm, spreading itself in spite of their congresses and hired Cossack, over every region of the new world”. In this respect some observers went so far as to elevate Christophe from an imitator of European monarchy to one who was in fact leading the way for other monarchs to follow.

Within this political climate, Christophe and supporters of his monarchy could more openly assert that the Haitian king was a viable political sovereign—and, importantly, one who would be willing to secure favourable trade agreements with Britain. Unlike earlier reports that expressed indignation at Christophe drinking toasts to his sovereign brother, the King of England, newspapers by the mid-1810s seemed happier to suggest a potential alliance in the light of commercial possibilities. Now reports of Christophe toasting the British monarch were received more favourably than at the beginning of the Haitian monarch’s reign as newspapers at least feigned enthusiasm. But the suggestion was clear—how could a monarch who so eagerly imitated British customs be anything but friendly to British commercial interests? The potential benefits of such a commercial relationship were to be emphasised in a number of reports. Newspapers such as the Morning Post carried reports of “richly laden” merchant vessels leaving Cape Henry alongside depictions of the “tranquil and

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183 Caledonian Mercury, 29 November 1817; Morning Post, 22 November 1817.
184 Morning Post, 13 August 1816.
185 Liverpool Mercury, 3 April 1818.
186 For examples of this indignation see York Herald, 7 September 1811.
187 Caledonian Mercury, 4 November 1816.
happy” Haitian state; a nation “full of loyalty to its Sovereign, and enthusiastically attached to its new Constitution, its laws, and independence”.

The fact that Christophe not only desired commercial relations with Britain but that he could provide security for them was key in these reports. Readers were told with some smugness that the king treated English merchants “with respect” but Americans “with every mark of scorn”. Further reports played up Christophe’s hatred for the French and dismissed suggestions that the Haitian king was willing to trade with France. And if potential British traders worried that Haiti may yet again succumb to French rule, newspapers were eager to stress the strength of Christophe’s army and the impregnability of his fortresses. In other words, British investments would be in safe hands.

Despite the mass interest in Haiti that seemed to consume the British press in the mid-1810s, by 1818 challenges to the presence of Christophe and the Haitian monarchy once more appeared in British newspapers with increasing frequency. In particular, stories of Christophe’s apparent cruelty began to show the king less as a dignified humble monarch and more as a tyrannical despot. Reports claimed that Christophe imprisoned and murdered merchants with little reason or judicial process and even placed Archbishops under house arrest. Stories such as these were hardly helped by the emergence of a report by the late 1810s that a British merchant in Haiti had been subjected to torture by thumb screws—an act that had allegedly been approved by Christophe. Therefore, in the same way that Americans had turned on Christophe’s presidency when they learned of his treatment of American merchants, a number of British newspapers now seemed to view these similar actions against a British citizen as a particular affront to British citizens everywhere. Although positive depictions of Christophe and reminders of his progressive attitudes towards education circulated in order

188 *Morning Post*, 1 October 1814.
189 *Caledonian Mercury*, 23 June 1814; *Trewman’s Post*, 8 December 1814.
190 *Morning Chronicle*, 22 January 1817; *Caledonian Mercury*, 30 January 1817.
191 This story was widely reported in Britain. See for example, *Hull Packet*, 18 March 1817. For an overview of the scandal, see Cole, *Christophe*, 236-238.
to counter stories of his supposed tyranny, it was clear that for a number of observers, opinion of the Haitian monarch was beginning to change once more.

In this atmosphere of increasing negativity towards King Christophe, a new text would appear that would again place the question of Christophe’s legitimacy as a sovereign at its heart. The History of the Island of St. Domingo, From its First Discovery by Columbus to the Present Period appeared in London anonymously in 1818, although it would later be credited to Sir James Barskett. Scholarly allusions to the History have rightly situated the text as a “pro-black” history for the way in which it positively looked back on the Haitian Revolution and its leading figures—particularly Toussaint Louverture. As biographical information on Barskett is almost non-existent it is difficult to ascertain whether he was a supporter of the abolitionists or not. Even if read as an abolitionist piece, however, the agency Christophe was given in the text for the improvements in Haitian society and the economy are a radical point of departure from British abolitionists who still preferred to keep relatively quiet on the issue of Christophe and instead preferred to see Haiti as a kind of little brother to guide and advise. In particular, if public opinion in Britain had started to turn against Christophe as a result of the thumb-screw scandal—and abolitionists continued to remain publicly quiet on the subject of the Haitian king—then Barskett’s text is an under-appreciated attempt to stem the rising tide of negativity towards Christophe and Haiti: one which strongly asserted the Haitian monarch’s right to sovereign recognition.

Barskett approached the contentious nature of Christophe’s monarchical title by asserting that initially Christophe had refused to take the “pompous title of emperor” and instead “contented himself with the modest designation of Chief of the Government of Hayti”.

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192 James Barskett, History of the Island of St. Domingo, from Its First Discovery by Columbus to the Present Period (London: Rest Fenner, 1818).
194 Barskett, History of St. Domingo, 336.
island was said to be “the opinion of the people at large” and that it was a necessity as it was “the only mode of government adapted to their country”. The establishment of monarchy was presented in the interests of the people and the best way to secure their rights, to protect their subjects and to secure respect abroad. The titles of Toussaint and Dessalines were dismissed as inappropriate and “the title of president hardly conveyed the idea of supreme power”. Ultimately, “no title was so proper as that of king” for the country itself and the title also represented “an act of necessary duty and national gratitude” to one who has served his country so well. Barskett concluded that the implementation of a monarchical system was “received by the people at large with general satisfaction”. The prickly issue of Christophe’s lavish coronation was tackled by agreeing with most British observers that it exuded “oriental inflation” but this was also defended as a celebration of the “complete success” of the Haitian adoption of monarchy. As Colley has demonstrated, by the early nineteenth century loyalist celebrations of George III positively defended his “capacity” for “glamorous show” and Barskett’s texts offered a similar defence of the glamour of Christophe’s coronation. According to Barskett the coronation “crowned Haiti’s independence” and, despite the apparent exuberance, “no impartial observer could withhold his admiration from the high state of order and civilisation which prevailed in the dominions of Christophe”.

In addition to justifying Christophe’s monarchical title, Barskett also looked to cement the Haitian monarch’s viability as a political leader who was not only doing what he could for the good of his people but who also displayed the necessary character and diplomatic skills to be included in international political relations. Barskett published Christophe’s Royal Almanack of 1814 in the appendix with some insightful commentary and praise. In particular, Barskett was complimentary of Christophe’s Code Henry—a series of laws announced shortly after his coronation which were designed to regulate “commerce, civil

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196 Barskett, History of St. Domingo, 351-357.
Despite the fact that these laws forced Haitians to labour on plantations, Barskett declared that the principles of the Code were “laid in justice, equity, and humanity”. Christophe was said to be trusting of his court and cabinet and was shown to be reasonable in his dealings with France. Far from the picture that was beginning to be painted in the British press of the violent and unpredictable monarch, Barskett drew parallels between Christophe and the still-revered Toussaint, particularly in their “moderation and temper”. Also, and possibly most importantly for foreign political observers, Christophe was said to encourage friendly trade relations with foreigners and even in his dealings with the antagonistic French he was said to be calm and reasonable. In these pages, Barskett sent a clear message to his British audience that King Christophe could, and should, be approached as a legitimate sovereign—and, crucially, one who could open lucrative avenues of commerce for the British.

Perhaps most pertinent of all was how Barskett presented more generally the progress a nation could make under the right monarch—and one who had his people’s interests at heart. The “magnanimous” Christophe answered petitions presented to him by the Haitian public. In this particular piece of praise, Barskett appeared to be displaying sympathy to the British reformers in the mid-1810s to late-1810s who had taken to mass petitioning to air their concerns to Parliament and the British monarchy, thereby suggesting the Haitian monarch was setting an example for the Prince Regent to follow. Barskett described how on the assumption of power Christophe “immediately made various beneficial arrangements” for securing trade and other “internal affairs” of the island. In the early days of his rule over northern Haiti, Barskett recalled that

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198 Barskett, *History of St. Domingo*, 413.
199 Ibid., 367, 362.
200 Ibid., 333-335.
201 Ibid., 362.
202 Ibid., 418.
203 Poole, *Politics of Regicide*, 152.
Christophe “was chastened by the warmest principles of rectitude and philanthropy; by a desire to heal the wounds of his distracted country, and to promote its agriculture, its commerce, its wealth and its happiness”. As with British depictions of the time, a significant amount of this praise was reserved for the education system implemented by Christophe and Barskett made clear that it was Christophe himself who had shown “the most laudable solicitude for the instruction of the rising generation”. Likewise, it was Christophe’s decision to fund a new college that would actively promote both the arts and sciences. Christophe’s plans were depicted as so “wise and benevolent” that Barskett predicted “Haiti will exhibit a population as generally educated as that of any country on the face of the globe”. Therefore, if as Colley suggests George III’s paternalism was a source of pride for British loyalists, Barskett’s depiction of the Haitian monarch sought to align Christophe with a British monarch that inspired loyalist sentiment—an alignment that in turn sought to counter the increasing animosity of the British press towards the Haitian king.

As texts such as Barskett’s show, Henry Christophe was a fluid, changing and contradictory figure in imaginations on both sides of the Atlantic. Although these depictions were often subject to the common racist rhetoric of the time, observers constructed representations of Christophe—and of the Haitian monarchy in general—to suit a variety of alternative agendas in both Britain and America in the early nineteenth century. The way in which these depictions were shaped and re-shaped time and time again is representative of the volatile political landscape of the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century. In particular, acceptance of the legitimacy of Christophe’s monarchy was a constant source of contention and an issue that was particularly susceptible to the wider context of Atlantic world politics in the 1810s.

The presence of a black, ex-slave who was the self-created monarch of a post-revolutionary state represented a paradoxical political figure in both America

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205 Ibid., 340.
and Britain. In America, public declarations of support became exponentially more difficult after Christophe’s coronation. In this sense, support for the Haitian king to promote more favourable commercial opportunities became secondary to the opportunity of denouncing the monarch to better attack the ideological foundations of monarchical governments everywhere. American republicans derided the fact that Christophe seemed to style himself on the British monarch as part of a more general narrative of scorn for the hereditary dynasties of the Old World. But Americans with mercantile interests saw the importance of supporting the Haitian king and legitimising his sovereignty in the hope that the American government would officially recognise Haiti’s independence—a recognition that could have led to better conditions for American merchants in the Haitian state. These depictions therefore excused Christophe’s imperial title as they sought to legitimise the Haitian’s monarchy sovereignty. Such assertions managed to simultaneously criticise forms of Old World monarchy by claiming that Christophe was succeeding in the betterment of his country in ways that Europe’s dynasties had failed. Whether American observers attacked or supported the presence of the Haitian state, the perceived legitimacy of its monarch was key to such discourses.

In Britain, the presence of yet another self-created, post-revolutionary imperial leader became less confronting after the subjugation of Napoleon and the restoration of traditional forms of governance in Europe. In this more stable political atmosphere, British observers were afforded greater opportunities to declare support for both the king and for trading with the Haitian kingdom. Praise for the Haitian monarch drew on the popularity of Britain’s own sovereign as depictions of Christophe asserted the virtues of caring, paternal monarchs and the benefits they can bring to their citizens. Critics of the Haitian king would express disdain at the perceived imitation of the British monarchy by a black political figurehead. However, the level of support Christophe found in Britain suggests that his adoption of monarchy found a receptive audience among British loyalists keen to assert the superiority of their mode of leadership in Atlantic world politics. In this way, the Haitian monarchy was as central to discourses of the virtues of monarchicalism—and of legitimate modes of governing
more generally—as it was to discussions of race and the potential of post-slavery societies. When news emerged of Christophe's death by the end of 1820, the political value of the first and only King of Haiti continued to resonate for observers on both sides of the Atlantic.
Chapter Four

“A Revolutionary Volcano”: The Death of Christophe and the Emergence of Boyer in American and British Political Discourse

The death of the King of Haiti was reported widely throughout American and British newspapers by the end of 1820. Although accounts differed in terms of the particulars of his death, most seemed to accept and agree on a number of key events. Christophe's troops were said to have grown disillusioned and disaffected with the cruelty and self-serving nature of their monarch's rule. Sensing this insubordination and hearing news that Christophe had suffered a stroke, which had rendered him paralytic, Jean-Pierre Boyer—the president of the southern republic of Haiti—marched to the north to defeat Christophe, as well as to unite northern and southern Haiti under one republican form of government. Some of Christophe’s troops apparently defected in order to assist in implementing this change in government.1 As Boyer’s soldiers and some of Christophe’s own treacherous troops reached the gates of the king’s magisterial fortress in October 1820, Christophe decided to take his own life rather than suffer the indignity of the coup that was unfolding. Some contemporaries considered the Haitian monarchy essentially ended with the death of Christophe: “the Monarchy of Hayti may be considered as having expired with Christophe”.2

Despite some early resistance from troops that remained loyal to Christophe, Boyer would go on to proclaim a unified Haitian republic and appoint himself the president—a title he would keep for another twenty-three years. Some historians have asserted the “remarkable stability” that Boyer initially brought to Haiti, especially after his bloodless annexation of neighbouring Santo Domingo (present-day Dominican Republic) in 1822.3 According to these studies, Haiti initially became “politically more relaxed” under Boyer’s early stewardship, particularly in contrast with the severe and autocratic forms of rule practised by

1 Observer, 11 December 1820; Dubois, Haiti, 85-86.
2 Jackson’s Oxford Journal, 9 December 1820.
3 Dubois, Haiti, 93.
Dessalines and Christophe.⁴ Although Boyer would end up cultivating his own brand of despotic leadership, rumours of this would not reach American and British news sources until the mid-1820s and so the apparent stability of the early 1820s was welcomed and even celebrated by a number of Haitian supporters in Britain and America.⁵

Hitherto little scholarly attention has been paid to transatlantic reactions to Christophe’s death, while Boyer’s period in charge—the longest of any of Haiti’s original revolutionary figures—is still largely defined by his decision in 1825 to pay reparations to France in exchange for official recognition of Haiti’s sovereign status. Scholarly work which is concerned with the impact that Boyer’s Haiti had for the wider world has tended to focus on the emigration scheme proposed by the American Colonisation Society (and supported by Boyer) to send free African-Americans to Haiti. The scheme was designed to both help the fledgling Haitian state establish a sort of ‘middle class’ that was seen as central to prosperous and stable societies as well as to alleviate racial tensions in American states that were confronted with an ever-increasing free-black population. Work such as this has highlighted the contentious nature of the emigration movement in both America and Haiti.⁶ Similar studies have also underlined Haiti’s significance as a symbol of freedom and inspiration for African-Americans throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Haiti’s continuing independence—despite a lack of official recognition of its sovereignty from the American government—

⁴ Fischer, Modernity Disavowed, 260.
⁵ By the late 1820s Boyer’s increasingly harsh agricultural policies had essentially reduced Haitian peasants to slave status in everything but name: Joan Dayan, "A Few Stories About Haiti, or Stigma Revisited," Research in African Literatures 35, no. 2 (2004), 161-164; Dubois, Haiti, 105-114.
was promoted as a source of pride for free African-Americans trying to carve a political identity for themselves in a largely hostile climate in America.⁷

Until now, however, little work has focused on the significance of the charged political climates of both Europe and the Americas in Atlantic receptions of the revolution against Christophe—a revolution that some observers believed held almost equal importance to the one that had established Haiti’s independence some sixteen years previously.⁸ In the early post-Christophe era, a number of representations of Haiti emerged that situated the downfall of the Haitian monarchy—and the implementation of a new, unified republican government—in American and British discussions of political power and legitimacy. At a time of domestic political agitation in America and Britain, Haiti’s turn to republicanism was celebrated by a number of different observers on both sides of the Atlantic—all of whom saw the implementation of a single unified republican government in Haiti as proof of the virtues of republican governance and of the dated modes of Old World dynastic rule.

Reactions to the death of the Haitian monarch and the emergence of a unified republican government were thus largely framed within more domestic political considerations on both sides of the Atlantic. Historians have noted that by the early 1820s, the often-referenced ‘Era of Good Feelings’ was all but over in America. The effects of an economic crisis fuelled by the Panic of 1819 were

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⁸ It is important to note that this chapter does not intend to argue that this rebellion against Christophe deserves equal status with the 1791-1804 Revolution. However, the term ‘revolution’ will be used not only as it most aptly describes the way that Christophe’s own subjects turned on him but also because this is how his death was viewed and described by the majority of American and British observers.
being felt throughout the country.\textsuperscript{9} This, along with political crises such as the Missouri Compromise, had largely “eroded popular nationalism”.\textsuperscript{10} Insecurity also abounded regarding America’s perceived weakness against the European powers and American political thought centred on a perception of the world as two “distinct and politically diametric spheres of a republican 'New World' and a monarchical 'Old World'”.\textsuperscript{11} Europe’s Holy Alliance met once again at the Congress of Troppau in October 1820 with a view to strengthen its union in order to more effectively quell the calls for political reform that were sweeping through Europe. Americans in general had “little affection” for the conservatives who had ruled Europe since the defeat of Napoleon and some feared that Europe’s sovereigns would seek to establish “puppet monarchies” in the New World to further strengthen their power.\textsuperscript{12} American politicians reacted by seeking to position the New World as a separate entity from European systems of politics and finance. As a result, American republicans highlighted the ideological conflicts that existed between America and countries that adhered to Old World political hierarchies, and political discussions in this time centred on which system of government would best succeed.\textsuperscript{13}

By 1820, the United States continued to witness the successful revolutions in Latin America—revolutions that were transforming the political landscape of the New World. The Spanish-American revolutionaries asserted the superiority of republicanism as a form of governance and, as Caitlin Fitz has recently demonstrated, their successes were largely celebrated throughout North America.\textsuperscript{14} Other historians have claimed that observers in the United States viewed the Spanish-American victories as “validation of their own revolution” and interpreted them as confirmation of Americans’ status as pioneers of an

\textsuperscript{9} The Panic of 1819 was the first major financial disaster of the early American republic. For an overview of the tensions and conflicting ideologies that emerged from this economic crisis, see Opal, "Natural Rights," 305-316.
\textsuperscript{10} Lewis, \textit{Problem of Neighbourhood}, 128.
\textsuperscript{11} Sexton, \textit{Monroe Doctrine}, 10, 37.
\textsuperscript{12} Gould, \textit{Among the Powers of the Earth}, 213; Sexton, \textit{Monroe Doctrine}, 58.
\textsuperscript{13} Lewis, \textit{Problem of Neighbourhood}, 141, 160.
\textsuperscript{14} Fitz, \textit{Our Sister Republics}, 34-40.
overhaul of traditional forms of power.\textsuperscript{15} The emergence of a unified Haitian republic was thus framed within these celebrations—and, in turn, these celebrations offered a new avenue of support for the Haitian state from Americans. Although American republicans were reluctant to align directly the Haitians’ success with those of the Spanish-American revolutionaries, narratives of Haiti’s revolution against monarchy deliberately contributed to a more general discourse in the United States that celebrated the virtues of republicanism.

By the 1820s, Americans were also witnessing the increasing power of their own federal government—one that by now lacked any real form of partisan resistance.\textsuperscript{16} As such, historians have argued that some Americans began to fear the emergence of a central “tyrannical” form of government in their own country.\textsuperscript{17} Other Americans were still wary of the potential internal threat posed by those who “stood alongside Great Britain, ready to undermine the republic from within”.\textsuperscript{18} At a time of such domestic political agitation, Haiti’s shift to republicanism—and the early positive depictions of its new president—served as a reminder for American audiences of the virtues of republican governance and ‘proof’ that America’s form of political leadership continued to be envied throughout the world. In addition, American merchants continued to see Haiti as a potentially profitable source of commerce, something which intensified in light of America’s economic woes of the late 1810s.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, where Haiti’s adoption of an archaic monarchical system in the 1810s had severely restricted support from American sources, its turn to republicanism meant that American merchants and traders in particular could seize on a moment of republican fervour in their calls for better trade agreements with the Haitian state and, in some cases, to call on the American government to reconsider their reluctance to formally recognise Haiti as a sovereign state. Merchants with a pro-Haiti agenda

\textsuperscript{15} Sexton, \textit{Monroe Doctrine}, 38.
\textsuperscript{16} Haynes, \textit{Unfinished Revolution}, 108.
\textsuperscript{17} Cayton, ”Continental Politics,” 305.
\textsuperscript{18} Haynes, \textit{Unfinished Revolution}, 109.
\textsuperscript{19} Fanning, \textit{Caribbean Crossing}, 45-47.
thus sought to intertwine arguments concerning the benefits of trade with the black republic with a more ideological celebration of republicanism. In essence, by promoting more favourable trade agreements with the Haitian state, these merchants argued America was in turn supporting the virtues and legitimacy of republican modes of governance.

Britain was a similarly insecure political entity in the early 1820s as loyalists mourned the death of the popular George III. The deceased king’s “simple personal piety” is said to have “elevated him in personal estimation” of the British public—a stark contrast with the debauchery associated with the lifestyle of his son, George IV. Since his time as Regent, the British public had loathed to see the emergence of a sovereign who paid such little regard to his subjects and who seemed only to live for decadence and self-indulgence. Historians have demonstrated how George IV’s eventual coronation in 1821 was met in some parts of the country with deep public disdain and anger. The coronation of such an unpopular sovereign came after British radicals had become increasingly more vocal in their calls for political reform since the mid-1810s. British radicals’ claims that the government and the Regent amounted to an oppressive political regime had previously been furthered by the public outcry following the Peterloo Massacre in 1819. The killings—along with the British government’s decision to further restrict freedom of the press in light of the events at Peterloo—enabled radicals in the early 1820s to assert the “moral bankruptcy of aristocratic government” as a plethora of publications flouted Britain’s sedition.

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20 Chase, 1820, 63-64. For an overview of the popularity of George III in the later years of his reign see Colley, “Apotheosis of George III.”
21 Poole, Politics of Regicide, 142. George IV was continually lambasted by satirists for his lifestyle and lack of paternalism as a sovereign: See Kenneth Baker, George IV: A Life in Caricature (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).
22 Chase, 1820, 71.
laws to print scathing commentaries of Britain's political elites. This resentment towards the new British sovereign intensified with the harsh treatment of his estranged wife, Caroline, and in particular George's attempts to obtain a divorce between 1820 and 1821. Accused of adultery and banished from the court by a husband who had embarked on several affairs, a large proportion of the British public rallied to her cause in what has since become known as the 'Queen Caroline Affair'. British radicals in particular seized on the affair as a central part of their denunciations of the new British monarch.

The British ruling classes were also anxious spectators to the revolutionary tide sweeping through Europe in the early 1820s. Revolutions in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Naples threatened to completely overturn the established order in Europe—something that was written about with enthusiasm in radical publications. As the renowned radical publisher and writer Richard Carlile would write of the period: "Paine thought he lived in the age of revolution, but the present moment better deserves the epithet". British radicals saw the revolutions as a potential catalyst for more universal political and social progress and vehemently derided the Holy Alliance for their attempts to negate this progress in the name of self-preservation. In this political climate, the death of a king across the Atlantic, as well as the news that Haitians had revolted in favour of reform and a complete change of government, was seized upon by a number of observers in Britain. British radical voices had hitherto largely ignored the topic of Haiti in their writing, possibly because Haiti’s apparent

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28 *The Republican*, 15 September 1820, cited in Chase, 1820, 166.
successes during Christophe’s reign would have disrupted their anti-monarchical narratives. However, the rebellion against a New World king and the establishment of republicanism in Haiti presented an opportunity for radical voices in Britain to legitimise both the uprising and Haiti’s new republic and to use them as valuable reference points in their calls for political and social reform. As this chapter will demonstrate, the death of the King of Haiti would be framed by a number of radical thinkers as a further act of emancipation for the Haitians and one that served to underline the universal desire for an upheaval of the established political order.

This chapter focuses on depictions of the death of Christophe and early receptions of Boyer’s rise to power to demonstrate how representations of both events were constructed within narratives that reflected upon the legitimacy and virtue of American and British modes of governance. As well as newspapers and periodicals, this chapter highlights how American and British figures from merchants to playwrights, from poets to caricaturists all sought to celebrate the death of Haiti’s monarch and Haiti’s turn to republicanism as proof of the virtuous nature of republican government. Malcolm Chase notes that by 1820 there was a “growing internationalism within reform opinion” as reformers and radicals across Europe looked to reformist movements and actions abroad for inspiration. The rebellion against Christophe was, indeed, viewed through this international lens by a number of transatlantic observers. At a time when revolutions throughout Europe and the Americas threatened to completely overturn the established political order in the Atlantic world, Haiti’s own revolution against its king and its implementation of republicanism became a key point of reference in a number of American and British political discourses—narratives that were increasingly anti-conservative in nature. While the governments of both America and Britain continued to refuse to recognise the Haitian republic, the depictions of Haiti explored in this chapter give a valuable insight into the nuances and complexities of American and British perceptions of

29 Chase, 1820, 166.
the Haitian republic—perceptions framed by considerations of political legitimacy and the virtues of republican governance.

**America and the Death of a New World Tyrant**

Given the significant decline in popularity that Christophe had suffered in America by 1820, it is perhaps unsurprising that the vast majority of reports described enthusiastically the death of the monarch. Reports of the demise of Haiti’s king sometimes alluded to the death of the “black chief” as newspapers sought to deny Christophe his royal title once and for all and to celebrate the removal of a black political figurehead from the Atlantic stage. Other reports emphasised Christophe’s race as they sarcastically alluded to “his Ebony Majesty”, as the death of a black king was depicted with a sense of relief and even joy. Articles such as these claimed that the death of King Christophe “should afford great satisfaction” to American readers and were undoubtedly in part race-based reactions formed from the disgust of some American observers at the presence of a black monarchy and its perceived pretensions of power and sovereignty. Such reports wondered, with fake empathy, over ‘[w]hat is to become of her black Majesty the Queen [and] the little black Prince Royal [?]’ as these news sources sneered at the demise of the Western hemisphere’s first black monarchy.

Newspaper reports that placed Christophe’s blackness at the heart of celebrations of the demise of the Haitian monarchy were nevertheless surprisingly few and far between. Instead, as with American depictions of him while he was alive, Christophe’s royal status was often depicted with equal—if not greater—significance than his race as commentators enthused over the

30 *City of Washington Gazette*, 7 November 1820.
31 These race-based reactions against Christophe from commentators outside of Haiti would largely continue until well into the twentieth century. Since then, Christophe’s rule has been treated to more thoughtful considerations of his reign: see for example Aimé Césaire’s 1963 play, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015).
32 *National Advocate for the Country*, 17 November 1820.
accounts of a revolution against monarchy in the New World. At a time when Americans continued to be further united in their derision of the dynasties of the Old World, American commentators reaffirmed the legitimacy of Christophe’s monarchy to reassert his ideological fraternity with the despised monarchs of Europe. As such, they claimed that the abolition of the Haitian monarchy “will cause much conversation among the legitimates in Europe”,33 Unsurprisingly, Hezekiah Niles’s Anglophobic *Weekly Register* was at the forefront of assertions that Christophe was “just as much entitled to his throne...as the best of them” and that, as a result, “his melancholy fate will excite the sympathies of the ‘Holy Alliance’”.34 In other editions the *Register* claimed that the death of “Christophe the Cruel” had been met with unbounded joy by the Haitian public as they were finally free from the tyranny of monarchy.35 Reports of the “great rejoicing” of the Haitians and claims that they were “highly elated” were common rhetoric in newspaper accounts of the revolution. These depictions not only encouraged American readers to share in this joy at the death of a king but they also warned European monarchs to view the rebellion in Haiti with alarm and trepidation as it was portrayed as being symptomatic of the revolutionary spirit sweeping across the Americas and Europe.36

Central to reports that celebrated the demise of a New World monarch were the often-gruesome imaginings of his death. While some articles salaciously reported that his head had been cut off and placed on a pole by the revolting troops, the majority of depictions accepted—but reported with equal verve—the version of events that culminated in Christophe “blowing his brains out”.37 A common feature of these reports was the apparent indignities the king’s corpse suffered. One such allegation was that Christophe’s body “was left on the road for some days, and was then carried to the edge of a wood, where it remained, partly

33 Ibid.
34 *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 11 November 1820.
35 *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 25 November 1820.
36 *Cohen’s Lottery Gazette*, 30 November 1820; *Boston Recorder*, 25 November 1820.
37 *National Gazette*, 14 November 1820; *City of Washington Gazette*, 7 November 1820.
naked”. Depictions asserted that Christophe’s own troops had robbed his corpse of his jewels including, some claimed, his crown. Even though this was reported to have cost 70,000 dollars, reports gleefully claimed that one of Christophe’s own troops had sold it to an American merchant for a mere twelve dollars. Reports such as these revelled not only in this revolution against a king but also in the very physical and literal removal of the supposed trappings of monarchical rule. In these depictions, the pomp of monarchy was literally laid bare and the illusion of the trappings of royalty were exposed to the American public. Newspapers cemented the image of the ex-king of Haiti abandoned by his troops, lifeless and naked on the side of the road while cries of “Vive la Liberte” echoed around him. As Niles’ Register would feign sympathetically: “Alas! poor royalty”. Therefore, while depictions of the end of Haiti’s monarchical regime may reflect a continuing ‘fear’ of the presence of black political leaders in Atlantic politics, they were also produced in a climate in which Americans continued to deride Old World dynasties and the very ideology of monarchism. The revolution against King Christophe thus afforded anti-monarchy American observers the opportunity to gloat over the death of a sovereign and the end of his monarchical regime.

Reports of the end of the Haitian monarchy often contained rumours that both northern and southern Haiti would soon be united under one republican government, with Jean-Pierre Boyer at its head. Such stories came at a time when American newspapers had been excitedly reporting the continuing successes of the republican revolutionaries of Spanish America. As Sexton highlights, the majority of Americans “welcomed the collapse of the Old World colonial order, viewing it as validation of their own revolution and an opportunity to expand their interests”. The American public responded to news of republics replacing Latin American colonies by naming livestock, towns, and even children after the

38 New Hampshire Sentinel, 25 November 1820; Cohen’s Lottery Gazette, 30 November 1820.
39 Niles’ Weekly Register, 10 February 1821.
40 Boston Recorder, 25 November 1820.
41 Niles’ Weekly Register, 10 February 1821.
42 Sexton, Monroe Doctrine, 38.
revolutionary heroes. As Fitz has demonstrated, by 1822 three-quarters of 4 July celebrations recorded in American newspapers included toasts to the newly established Spanish-American republics and their founders. Fitz has further argued that Haiti was, in general, excluded from celebratory narratives that explicitly drew parallels among the revolutionaries of Spanish America and the United States because the black state had “gone too far”. Michael J. Dash also notes the continued lack of official recognition of Haiti from the American government despite the very public support for the revolutions in Spanish America. Dash highlights the role southern planters in the United States played in this as Haiti was “relegated...to a zone of negativity and absence” in the 1820s. However, if in this time the Americas “increasingly seemed like a sanctuary for liberal republics; [and] Europe a final, desperate bastion for absolutist monarchy”, then depictions of the revolution against Christophe must be viewed—at least in part—as a product of the championing of New World republicanism.

Although Fitz claims that uncomfortable memories of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 generally excluded Haiti from celebratory anti-colonial narratives in the 1820s, the rebellion against Haiti’s monarch was framed by some newspapers as a “Revolution in favour of Liberty”. For reports such as these, the uprising against Christophe meant that Haiti’s ‘real’ revolution had occurred—and one that, crucially, American republicans could more comfortably support. Whereas the 1791-1804 revolution involved the destruction of the plantation system and the deaths of white army officers, colonists, and civilians, the Haitians’ ousting of a monarchical figure in 1820 allowed American newspapers to now respond more enthusiastically to events in Haiti. Newspapers looked forward to an “entire subversion of the imperial regime” and

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43 Fitz, *Our Sister Republics*, 4.
44 Ibid., 189.
45 Ibid., 83.
47 Fitz, *Our Sister Republics*, 122.
48 *National Gazette*, 26 January 1821.
predicted that “nothing...will arrest the Republican progress” in the Haitian state. Narratives that celebrated the end of the Haitian monarchy in general refused to explicitly align this rebellion in Haiti with the other republican revolutions in Spanish America. Nonetheless, newspapers such as Philadelphia’s Weekly Aurora claimed that Boyer’s attempts to establish “republican institutions upon the ruin of the cruel tyranny which existed under the imperial government” was of paramount importance to America, “if not to mankind in general”. American reports lauded this revolution and stressed that Haitians had not only overthrown the monarchy but were “hastening to embrace” a republican form of government—proof that, even for ex-slaves, ‘liberty’ under a monarchical regime was nothing more than a fallacy. Reports such as those found in the Aurora enthusiastically predicted that “[s]hould [Boyer’s] plans succeed...we shall soon be presented with a new era in the progress of liberty and independence”. These kinds of pro-Haitian reports looked to frame the uprising in Haiti in a discourse that celebrated New World resistance to European political thought. Although Boyer’s Haiti would not be overtly aligned with the new republics of Spanish America it was, nevertheless, framed in a more general celebration of the republicanism found in the Western hemisphere and a continued American denunciation of the repressive and archaic nature of Old World monarchies.

Jean-Pierre Boyer and American Republican Imaginations

The emergence of a peaceful, unified Haitian republic allowed Americans to further underline the virtuous nature of republican governance and to reaffirm America’s status as paving the way for these new forms of republican governments to emerge—an important inward reflection at a time when the American public’s confidence in its government had been severely tested. American politics by 1820 had “faced a multi-faceted crisis”, according to James

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49 Daily Intelligencer, 11 November 1820.
50 Weekly Aurora, 4 December 1820.
51 Daily Intelligencer, 11 November 1820; Democratic Press, 6 November 1820.
52 Weekly Aurora, 4 December 1820.
E. Lewis, as the Panic of 1819 and the Missouri Crisis in particular had “threatened the stability of the union by eroding both the power and authority of the federal government and the ties and sympathies between the states”. As Fitz has further highlighted, by the 1820s a large number of political observers viewed America as “a lonely republic bobbing alone in a churning sea of monarchy”. Although the War of 1812 and its succeeding years had instilled a sense of American patriotism—particularly for its form of government—the political crises and tensions that converged in America by the late 1810s led Americans to once more view their republic as “internally vulnerable” and weak compared to the Old World powers that continued to dominate Atlantic world politics. In this context, reports of an uprising against the monarchy in Haiti allowed American newspapers to remind its readers of the instability and undercurrent of revolution that existed in countries ruled by monarchies, while reminding Americans of their superior and overall more stable form of governance—a crucial shot in the arm for American republicans at a time when public confidence in the federal government was at a low.

Newspaper reports that patriotically sought to underline the glorious nature of republicanism soon focused on the distinctly contrasting characters of the fallen Haitian king and Haiti’s new republican saviour. Publications continued to remember the ex-king’s “ferocious disposition” and that the “principles of morality were no guide to him”. For these reasons, such reports asserted, Christophe’s reputation in America “has been neither favourable to him as a man or a monarch” and the nature of his death served to justify such opinions. American reports situated depictions of the republican leader Boyer directly opposite those of the “absolute and despotic” monarch. In a stark contrast to the Haitians’ apparent detestation of their king, Boyer’s popularity was allegedly “unbounded” and early reports of his reign in Haiti spoke of “the Freedom which

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53 Lewis, Problem of Neighbourhood, 126.
54 Fitz, Our Sister Republics, 3.
55 Sexton, Monroe Doctrine, 10.
56 The Atheneum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines, 1 May 1821, 93; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, 10 February 1821.
57 National Advocate for the Country, 17 November 1820.
is enjoyed, and the republican justice which is practised". Reports such as these commonly claimed that Christophe’s family were now under the protection of Boyer—a striking contrast to the allusions to Christophe’s inhumane and bloodthirsty nature that were so common in the American press. Even when newspapers reported that Christophe’s sons had been killed in the revolution, they also claimed that this had happened before Boyer had arrived at the palace and that it would not have occurred under his guidance. While there is little evidence to support these stories, these depictions nonetheless underlined the importance of paternal, humane and non-violent leadership for effective, legitimate republican leaders.

This feeling of positivity towards the “Washington of Hayti” was common in American newspapers by the end of 1820. The wave of celebration for Haiti’s new republican leader prompted the New York Literary Journal, and Belles-Lettres Repository to publish a remarkable poem celebrating the republican spirit of Haiti’s new head of state—the anonymous, ‘To Freedom’s Sons of St. Domingo’. In it, Boyer was legitimised not only as a viable political leader, but crucially one who fitted the mould of exemplary republicanism:

Proud the march of the free and brave,
When they march to freedom—or the grave,
Nor seek alone their lives to save,
But Liberty.

Proud is the warrior’s sparkling eye,
When tyrants hosts in terror fly
Before the men who dare to die
For Liberty!

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58 New Hampshire Sentinel, 25 November 1820; National Gazette and Literary Register, 26 January 1821.
59 Boston Recorder, 26 November 1820; Niles’ Weekly Register, 2 December 1820.
60 Litchfield Republican, 23 April 1821; Vermont Journal, 16 April 1821.
61 New York Literary Journal, and Belles-Lettres Repository, 1 December 1820, 92-95.
And proud are they, tho’ white men scorn
The jetty black which wraps each form,
To follow in the battle’s storm

           Brave Boyer!

Proud is their look of conscious might,
When they rush to the field of fight,
Where thy banner is waving bright,

           Brave Warrior!

Proudly thy name to earth’s gone forth,
To east, to west, to south, to north,
None e’er can find, ‘mong all their worth,

           A Braver!

Prouder than all that day shall be,
When St. Domingo’s sons are free,
And thousand tongues cry “hail to thee,”

           Our Saviour.

The poem was an explicit celebration of the Haitian rebellion against its
monarchy—one which had caused tyrants to flee and which proclaimed the
virtues of freedom and liberty. More striking than this, however, is how two-
thirds of the poem acted as a celebration of the “Brave Boyer”. The poem’s
description of Haitians who “rushed to the field of fight” and followed their
“Brave Warrior” in the name of liberty, clearly called to mind American
memories and celebrations of their own revolutionary heroes. Boyer’s
leadership and republican form of governance was depicted as the final act of
freedom that Haiti’s ex-slaves had yet to experience and was framed as the
ultimate form of emancipation. The fifth stanza’s assertion that Boyer’s
reputation and bravery could not be bettered throughout the world was a
significant declaration and the poem as a whole represents a particularly forceful
celebration of Haiti’s new leader and the perceived accomplishments of his revolution. By outlining the achievements of Haiti’s republican revolution and the character of its leader, the anonymous poet clearly sought to legitimise Boyer’s form of republicanism as one with which Americans should identify and align.

It is important to note that the figure of Boyer did not elicit as much enthusiasm as depicted in this poem from all American observers. For example, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has demonstrated how Leonora Sansay’s 1819 novel Zelica—a novel which, like Secret History, is situated in the latter years of the Saint-Domingue revolution—portrayed Haitians and their leaders as undeserving of and unsuitable to the ‘virtuous’ nature of republican governance. Sansay’s novel was published two years before the overthrow of Christophe and Boyer’s succession, but a number of publications at the beginning of 1821 were clearly intent on communicating a similar message. These reports were hesitant to add their voices to these choruses of approval of Boyer, particularly as reports from Haiti contested claims that Boyer had brought tranquillity to the north and instead asserted that the overthrowing of Christophe had only resulted in outright chaos for the whole nation—reports that in turn denied Boyer’s legitimacy as a republican president and Haiti’s legitimacy as a republic. As opposed to being a united country under Boyer’s government, such articles claimed the nation was divided by race as mulatto Haitians were said to favour the republican form of government, while the black citizens of Haiti were said to be in favour of monarchy. Newspapers doubted whether Boyer had the “energy and promptness” of his predecessor to deal with such social and racial tensions. Perhaps more significantly, where sources praising the president enthused about his moderate temper and mild form of government as one befitting of this new republic, these alternative depictions claimed that “his reputed mildness is not

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63 *Essex Register*, 4 April 1821; *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, 11 May 1821.
appreciated as a very estimable trait by such people as the Haytians”.

As a result, such reports concluded: “All things appeared to be paving the way for some ambitious Chief to...wade through rivers of blood up to throne”. While mildness in government may be a positive trait in more ‘civilised’ republics, Haiti was depicted as a site of political turmoil and incivility—and therefore an infertile land in which the fruits of ‘true’ republicanism could grow.

Despite these negative depictions, in general Americans were presented with representations that were enthusiastic about Haiti’s change in government and its new leader. Although a handful of reports were disparaging of the president—with some claiming that he was “but a military chief”—the majority sought to legitimise Boyer’s status as a republican president.

At a time when confidence in the American federal government had been severely dented, the emergence of a republican leader in northern Haiti allowed American commentators to project affirmations of how republican governments should operate and how their leaders should act in the interests of the country. The kind of social and political utopia presented in republican Haiti apparently stemmed from the example set by the laws of Boyer’s government, which were “consonant with every feeling of policy, justice and humanity”. Boyer’s just and mild form of governance was such that “the keys of the prison in this government are literally covered with rust”—a world away from reports of the tyrannical and oppressive monarchical regimes of Christophe and the dynasties of the Old World.

Similarly, other reports asserted that upon hearing of Haitians ransacking the palaces, Boyer allegedly issued a decree to the looters that all property was to be returned to the republic within a day or the criminals would face prosecution. While there is little evidence to determine whether this decree existed or not, such portrayals of an honourable and virtuous leader led newspapers such as the National Advocate to conclude that: “Every measure of the Haytian chief envinces

64 Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, 13 March 1821; National Gazette and Literary Register, 31 March 1821.
65 National Gazette and Literary Register, 31 March 1821.
66 National Gazette and Literary Register, 29 March 1821.
67 Boston Recorder, 5 May 1821.
a decision and promptness that fully qualify him for the high station which he
occupies...His ideas of liberty are clear and his abhorrence of tyranny marked
and explicit”.68 “Under the auspices of such a man,” one newspaper enthused,
“Hayti is destined to become an interesting republic”.69

Central to these positive reports of the Haitian president were claims that Boyer
planned to heal the political divisions between northern and southern Haiti by
forming a single republican form of government—‘proof’ for American
republicans of the unifying nature of republican forms of government and of the
divisiveness that despotism and monarchical rule could breed. By the middle of
1821, newspaper reports emerged that Boyer had quelled a rebellion by some of
Christophe’s former troops and that in Haiti “[tranquillity] is everywhere
established”.70 Boyer was praised not only for his ability to quash the alleged
rebellion but that he did so with moderation—a mildness that even extended to
the chief rebels to whom he reportedly “exercised clemency whenever it could
with propriety be extended”.71 It was said that Boyer had therefore given a “new
and pacific tone to the affairs of that country” and that he was “equally skilled” in
“wielding alike the insignia of war and peace”.72 In this light, Boyer’s Haiti served
as an example for newspapers in the United States to remind American readers
that ‘real’ tyranny existed in the lands of kings, and not in the liberal utopias of
republican seats of governance. Although little had been reported of Boyer in the
American press prior to the death of Christophe, he soon emerged to the
American public as the type of leader who once again allowed Haiti to be viewed
with promise—and one who was proof of the virtuous nature of republicanism,
which was a deliberately self-vindicating message.

The idea that Boyer had not only emancipated Haitians in the north from the
tyranny of monarchy but that the implementation of a republican mode of

68 National Advocate, 29 February 1821.
69 Litchfield Republican, 23 April 1821.
70 Republican Gazette and General Advertiser, 30 June 1821; Providence Patriot,
13 January 1821.
71 Vermont Republican, 28 May 1821.
72 Litchfield Republican, 23 April 1821.
government translated into a more stable and justly governed Haitian state overall was a key component of American reports that looked favourably on the new leader. In such reports, Haitian citizens were depicted as deserving of and benefitting from this new form of governance, despite its perceived trials and tribulations—a timely reminder for the citizens of the increasingly turbulent American republic. The benefits of a leader such as Boyer—and of the adoption of a republican mode of governance—were clearly outlined in reports on the revolution against Christophe. Newspapers such as the Niles’ Weekly claimed that the rebellion “is said to be producing the most happy effects” and that under Boyer “harmony prevails” and that the people were “united”. The Niles’ Weekly asserted that the new government was beneficial to the “condition” of Haiti’s inhabitants. Other newspapers such as the Boston Recorder also published reports that claimed in Haiti “there are fewer of those vices which too often deform the human character, to be found here, than in any other country with which I am acquainted”. Reports such as these asserted that in Boyer’s Haiti “[c]alumny [sic]...you never hear”, “thievery” was “almost unknown”, “[t]radesmen and retailers are honest to a proverb” and even swearing was “seldom heard”. In this way, positive depictions of Haiti’s newly unified republic—at a time of tension and insecurity for America’s own republican citizens—allowed newspapers to ‘remind’ their readers of the benefits that republicanism can bring to the civility and morality of a nation as a whole.

It is perhaps unsurprising that these positive portrayals of Boyer’s Haiti often included discussions concerning America and Haiti’s commercial relationship. Fanning’s work has highlighted how Boyer’s stewardship—and in particular the annexation of Santo Domingo—“raised hopes” among American merchants that this new market would be beneficial to an American economy still suffering from the effects of the financial crisis of the late 1810s. Fanning has shown how news sources such as the Niles’ Register and the National Gazette asserted the importance of the Haitian republic in helping America’s economic woes. Some

73 Niles’ Weekly Register, 10 February 1821; 29 December 1821.
74 Boston Recorder, 5 May 1821.
newspapers even went so far to claim that the Haitian market alone could keep Americans in constant employment, with a number of readers writing in to share their enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{75} Proponents who clearly wished to see more favourable trade links established with Haiti advocated Haiti’s new republican status in their attempts to promote a commercial alliance with the black republic. By the end of 1821, newspapers were beginning to report approvingly of Boyer’s apparent friendliness to foreigners and of a desire and willingness to help foreign traders conduct business safely in the republic.\textsuperscript{76} Other publications claimed that even without a formalised trade agreement between the two republics, exports to Haiti were worth more than those to Europe—with the exception of England, France and Holland—leading such reports to conclude that “the negroes of Hayti are more interesting to us, in a commercial point of view, than ‘legitimate’ Russia, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, Turkey, all the states of Italy, and half a dozen more ‘powers’”.\textsuperscript{77}

Some pro-trade proponents nevertheless sought to more explicitly combine economic support for Haiti with assertions to the legitimacy of its form of republicanism. The depiction of Haiti under Boyer as a stable and exemplary form of republican government was a key component of John Dodge’s lengthy and wide-ranging promotion of the Haitian republic entitled “A Memorial Upon the Subject of Hayti”.\textsuperscript{78} Dated 5 September 1821, Dodge’s “Memorial” was written for and sent to John Quincy Adams—at that time the United States’ Secretary of State. Dodge was a prominent Boston merchant and “one of the most active American traders” in early-nineteenth-century Haiti, with at least

\textsuperscript{75} Fanning, Caribbean Crossing, 45-47.
\textsuperscript{76} Alexandria Gazette, 18 October 1821; Boston Commercial Gazette, 18 October 1821.
\textsuperscript{77} Niles’ Weekly Register, 23 March 1822. Niles’s enthusiasm was understandable—by 1821 American merchants were responsible for supplying almost half of all of Haiti’s imports: Trouillot, Haiti: State against Nation, 53, cited in Gaffield, “‘Outrages on the Laws of Nations’,” 176.
\textsuperscript{78} Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Fr 12 F, John Dodge, “A Memorial Upon the Subject of Hayti...Presented to the Hon. John Quincy Adams, Esq.,” 5 September 1821.
two trading companies in Cap Haïtien. Unsurprisingly, then, Dodge wrote his “Memorial” in the hope of persuading Adams to both establish more lucrative commercial relations between America and the black republic as well as to do more to protect the commercial interests of American citizens already trading with the Haitians.

As a resident on the island, Dodge asserted the importance of his role as an “actual observer of the substantial commercial benefits which his citizens have reaped”. Dodge noted that these benefits had occurred despite Haiti’s revolutionary past and its successive despotic regimes as well as the reluctance of America to formally ratify trade agreements with Haiti. As such, Dodge hoped to outline to Adams the necessity of placing “American trade to Hayti, upon a fair footing” and that to do so would be “a great national benefit” to the United States as a whole. In the letter, Dodge highlighted the fact that American merchants were subject to almost double the duties and tariffs that British merchants had to pay—something he attributed to the fact that, unlike the American government, the British government “protects” its trade with Haiti. Dodge was also anxious that Britain or France would solidify their commercial relationship with the new Haitian president—something which could have had disastrous consequences for American merchants. Dodge emphasised the urgency he felt was needed in the matter by concluding his memorial with the prediction that “the Garden of the West Indies” would be “blooming and flourishing” in a matter of years, leading to the formation of a formidable “West Indian Empire”.

Dodge’s clear inference, then, was that if America wanted to secure its own

81 Ibid., ff. 7-8. Fanning claims that British merchants took advantage of establishing favourable relations with Haiti during America’s embargo between 1806-1810, leading to significant concessions for British traders: Fanning, "Early Black Nationalism," 66-67. See also Trouillot, *State against Nation*, 50-51 for an overview of favourable conditions for British merchants in this time.
82 Dodge, "Memorial," f. 19.
status as a serious economic power in the Atlantic world, it needed to foresee the future of the New World—one that had Haiti at its centre.

Dodge’s letter is most noteworthy for the way in which it intertwined economic arguments with appraisals of Haiti’s adoption of republicanism, something that he clearly believed lent greater weight to his calls for improved commercial relations. Although Fanning has underlined that pro-trade articles tended to allude to Haiti’s republican status, Dodge’s text was unique in that it was an explicit celebration of the “privileges of self-government [and] Independent Sovereignty”, which was something he believed “the almighty, and their own bravery, has given them”. Adams was said to be sceptical of the ability of the newly independent states of Spanish America to establish stable and liberal forms of government and Dodge’s writing displayed an acute awareness of such scepticism. Dodge sought to explicitly underline Haiti’s legitimacy as a republic by asserting that Boyer’s succession would result in the establishment of a “contended and permanent Government” throughout Haiti—a government that could, therefore, be traded with security and confidence. From the beginning of his plea to Adams, Dodge framed the ideological fraternity of the two republics by underlining the “bonds of attachment between the republicans of Hayti, and the republicans of the United States”. Dodge criticised those who dismissed this revolution because “the tint of their skin, was a shade or two darker than that of some other resisters of Despotism” and claimed that the rebellion against Christophe should in fact be considered as one of the greatest accomplishments of mankind. Haiti’s and America’s anti-monarchical and revolutionary pasts were explicitly aligned, as Dodge recalled: “the Liberty, which we religiously regard...is as free as the air we inhale, and by the very genius and spirit of our own Government, any set of men who have energy enough to emancipate themselves [sic] from the thraldom of Oppression are in effect of our Kindreds, our brethren

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83 Ibid., f. 10.
84 Lewis, Problem of Neighbourhood, 158.
86 Ibid., f. 4.
and our allies”. Dodge suggested that the creation of more legitimate avenues of trade with the Haitians was not only in the interests of America’s economy but that it also constituted a moral obligation to lend support and legitimacy to a nation ideologically aligned closely with the American republic.

As Dodge was all too aware, however, how do you establish favourable and secure trade relations with a nation that your government does not formally recognise? As Fanning has demonstrated, this was a question that was addressed in a number of pro-trade articles that called on the American government to formally recognise the Haitian republic. Dodge clearly saw formal recognition of Haiti as vital to securing American merchants’ interests in the Haitian state and he outlined the necessity of recognising Haiti’s sovereignty in both formal and informal contexts. Dodge referred to often-made claims in the American press that during his reign, Christophe had seized large quantities of cargo owned by Americans—cargo for which they had yet to be compensated. But Dodge argued that Christophe had done so because American merchants routinely failed to recognise the king and Haiti’s sovereign status and therefore failed to pay them the diplomatic respect they deserved. Dodge claimed that because Americans had persistently viewed Christophe as the “[c]hief of a band of rebel slaves” and had refused to recognise him as the monarch of an independent nation, the Haitian king had simply mirrored this contempt. The warning was for American merchants—and the American government—not to fall into a similar, self-defeating trap with Haiti’s new head of state.

Dodge was clearly anxious that this form of disrespect and non-recognition towards Haiti’s leaders—and the damaging impact this had on trade with American merchants—would continue unless America formally recognised the Haitian republic. As such, Dodge asserted that Boyer’s succession represented a clean slate between Haiti and America. This even extended to calls that Boyer

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87 Ibid., f. 11.
89 Dodge, "Memorial," f. 16.
should compensate Americans for the losses and seizures suffered under Christophe. Julia Gaffield has highlighted how the compensation claims of American merchants between 1820 and 1821 and their attempts to elicit support from John Adams often centred on the question of Haiti’s sovereign status.90 However, although Adams did write to Boyer to ask for the merchants to be compensated, he allegedly avoided the issue of recognition altogether.91 Dodge argued that asking for Haiti to pay for the acts of a “previous Dynasty” was unreasonable and not how America would behave towards other nations, questioning whether America would ask the recently restored Bourbon monarchy in France to compensate any Americans who had suffered financial loss as a result of Napoleon’s actions.92 This call to cancel claims for compensation is all the more interesting for the fact that Dodge himself had gone through the Haitian courts to claim $20,000 allegedly owed to him from Dessalines’s widow in 1814—a sum of money he would never receive, despite the courts upholding his claim.93 Therefore, despite his own vested interest in making such claims, Dodge clearly saw the importance of American recognition of Haiti and friendly relationships with the new government as far outweighing demands for compensation.

Newspapers mirrored Dodge’s calls for recognition of the Haitian state by alluding to Haiti’s republican form of government and its “just and equitable principles towards other nations”.94 However, Dodge’s “Memorial” was unique in the way that it directly framed the recognition of Haiti’s sovereignty as a question of America’s principled and moral standing. Dodge called for Haiti to be accepted into the “great family of Nations” by arguing that such recognition would be compatible with the “principles” and “policy” of America.95 Acceptance of Haiti’s independence was placed by Dodge in the context of “this age of liberal

91 Ibid.
92 Dodge, "Memorial," ff. 15-16.
93 Gonzalez, "Defiant Haiti," 4.
94 Woodstock Observer, 15 January 1822. Fanning also mentions allusions to Haiti’s republican status by American merchants: Caribbean Crossing, 43.
95 Dodge, "Memorial," ff. 2-4.
refinement”—an age which, as Dodge highlighted, had led to the much-celebrated revolutions of Spanish America. Dodge questioned why Haiti’s revolution against monarchy would be excluded from the American government’s apparent approval of those other rebellions against oppression and went so far as to argue that failure to recognise Haiti formally would be inconsistent with the American constitution. For Dodge, the question of recognition was not only grounded in America’s political identity and in keeping with its acceptance of other revolutions in the Americas. It was also the duty of “the Philanthropist, the Republican and the Christian” to “point out to that unfortunate people the right path to civilisation and national happiness”.96 If—as Fitz has argued—Adams believed in “the trinity of republican government, commercial reciprocity, and religious tolerance”, then Dodge was clearly aware of this and tried to appeal to Adams’s principles.97 In this way, the question of Haitian recognition was framed not merely within discussions of America’s economy and security—it was a question of America’s soul.

Arguments in favour of formally recognising Haiti’s sovereignty would fall on deaf ears, however. Instead the American government continued to pursue a policy of non-recognition—a policy which found a distinct amount of support in the American press. At the heart of calls to deny Haiti recognition was the legitimacy it would allegedly give to a black republic founded on a revolution against slavery—something which was seen as particularly incendiary and dangerous for America’s southern slave-holding states.98 As the National Gazette summarised succinctly: “If there is any circumstance which, especially, has weakened or destroyed the internal security of the slave-holding members of the Union, it is the establishment of the negro-power in Hayti”.99 Recognition of Haiti’s independence, the Gazette concluded, “would add to the force and activity of the evil influence implied in their independent constitution”. The “evil influence” was a reference to the failed slave revolt of the freed-slave Denmark

96 Ibid., f. 10.
97 Fitz, Our Sister Republics, 200.
98 Fanning, Caribbean Crossing, 48.
99 National Gazette and Literary Register, 14 August 1822.
Vesey in Charleston in July 1822. Fanning observes that the Vesey rebellion damaged hopes of Haitian recognition significantly as southern planters claimed that Haiti’s own successful slave revolution was finally being exported to America’s shores.\(^{100}\) In the same article the *Gazette* displayed an awareness of a letter allegedly written from Boyer to Dodge—evidence perhaps that Dodge had written directly to the Haitian president in his attempts to garner support and protection of American merchants. Although the *Gazette* accepted that “unrestricted trade” would be beneficial, it concluded that it would rather “let that trade be sacrificed than expose a large portion of the Union to greater domestic danger”.\(^{101}\)

In addition to anxieties that recognition of Haiti would promote ideas of slave revolution in America, opponents also focused on a fear or disgust of black diplomacy in their arguments. Articles such as those found in the *Gazette* expressed revulsion at the idea of Americans not only accepting but inviting negotiations with black diplomats of the “mock republic”. They derided calls for an ideological fraternity with “a community of blacks, who have become free by the murder or expulsion of their masters”.\(^{102}\) In this way, both the race and violent revolutionary past of the Haitian state served to delegitimise its status as a free political entity in the eyes of some American observers. This anxiety towards black diplomacy even extended to publications that had been hitherto supportive of Haiti’s republican turn. For example, in a lengthy article September 1823, the *Niles’ Weekly Register* began by apparently reaffirming its support for the Haitian republic by asserting that its “regular and enlightened government of the republican form” was said to be “more liberal...than any now existing in Europe” with the exception of Britain and Spain.\(^{103}\) The *Register* enthused about Haiti’s schools, public offices and businesses, along with its system of government. Boyer was described as “an able general and a profound statesman” who ruled with presidential moderation and restraint, leading the *Register* to

\(^{100}\) Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing*, 52-53.

\(^{101}\) *National Gazette and Literary Register*, 14 August 1822.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.

\(^{103}\) *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 27 September 1823.
conclude: “There is no king in Europe, with the same power that he possesses, [who] would use it with the same moderation and justice”. However, despite the apparent progress of Haiti and its flourishing state as an embodiment of the virtues of republicanism, the Register summarised the anxieties of even those who in principle supported the notion of Haitian recognition: “are we yet prepared to send and receive ministers to and from Hayti? Could the prejudices of some, and the, perhaps just fears of others, be quieted? We think not. The time has not yet come for a surrender of our feelings about color, nor is it fitting at any time, that the public safety should be endangered”.104 The legitimisation of black diplomacy and the perceived threat to the safety of Americans that this supposedly posed was apparently too much for even a publication such as the Register. Where some newspapers supported Haitian independence outright, for those such as the Register this support waned as the threat, rather than the promise, of a black republic apparently loomed large.

Monroe’s administration apparently agreed with those voices that expressed concern over the potential consequences of American recognition of the Haitian state. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 simultaneously recognised the independence of Spanish America’s new republics while refusing to recognise the sovereignty of the Haitian state, which was something that infuriated a number of American observers—particularly those with mercantile interests.105 Reports emerged in American newspapers that echoed Dodge’s “Memorial” two years earlier by portraying pro-trade, pro-recognition and pro-republicanism policies as intrinsically linked. These reports in turn sought to frame Monroe’s rebuke of Haitian calls for sovereignty as being unreflective of the virtuous nature of republican leadership. Newspapers such as The Pittsburgh Recorder argued that it was “a reproach to our republic, that we have not yet openly and manfully acknowledged the independence of St. Domingo” and at the centre of such lamentations was the observation that “[w]e might in all probability, by doing an act of common justice, procure to ourselves important commercial

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104 Ibid.
105 Fanning, Caribbean Crossing, 51. For an overview of the background to and consequences of the legislation see Sexton, Monroe Doctrine.
advantages”.

Reports such as these aligned America’s political identity as a liberal progressive-thinking republic with the economic benefits that recognition would bring. Newspapers argued that formal recognition would be an “act of liberality” which would, in turn, “reap many exclusive advantages”. Such reports enthused about Haiti’s “secure and well balanced government”. These articles wrote approvingly of the “beloved and respected” Boyer and of Haiti’s Congress and House of Representatives. They also described the state papers of the new republic which were “remarkable” and “worthy...of imitation of the European Potentates” as they contained “no cumbrous phraseology, no laboured obscurity of expression”. Instead, “the state paper comes home direct to the point, with all the conscious boldness that honesty always inspires”. Thus, arguments in favour of Haiti’s recognition were framed within a celebration of the virtues of republicanism and sought once more to include Haiti in a celebratory discourse of New World republicanism, despite the official slight of the Haitian state by the Monroe Doctrine. Although these calls for recognition in the early years of Boyer’s reign ultimately failed, they nonetheless reflect how some observers saw the question of Haitian recognition as a reflection of America’s own republicanism and that to deny Haiti their sovereignty was a stain on America’s own political identity.

British Perceptions of the Death of a New World King

In these same early years of his reign, Boyer’s brand of republicanism would eventually stir similar excitement on the other side of the Atlantic. However, in the immediate aftermath of Christophe’s death, the fallen Haitian king found more vocal pockets of support in British discourses than in American publications. Although such positive reports were far from abundant, they were a significant point of departure from the majority of representations of the monarch that were produced in Britain towards the end of his reign. With the

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106 Pittsburgh Recorder, 25 September 1823.
108 Christian Watchman, 14 June 1823.
109 Pittsburgh Recorder, 25 September 1823.
exception of notable support from rare texts such as James Barskett’s *History of St. Domingo*, in general Christophe’s reputation was almost completely in ruins in Britain before his death, as newspapers and periodicals regularly attested to his tyranny and cruelty. But after his death, more articles could be found that wrote approvingly of the monarch’s consultations with British abolitionists to establish schools, roads and hospitals. Some went so far as to claim that he had been “animated with a desire to advance the conditions of his subjects”. Such reports conceded to the truth of stories of his cruelty, but they simultaneously asserted that this had often been necessary and that he had retained “no bad idea of the duties of a monarch in so rude a society”.\textsuperscript{110} Others even claimed that Christophe had confided to a British officer that “he knew he was considered a tyrant, but that it was necessary to [be] so; the people would be more fit for liberty hereafter”—thereby offering an excuse for Christophe’s tyranny after his death that was largely absent in British reports towards the end of his reign.\textsuperscript{111}

As discussed in the previous chapter, British newspapers that asserted their outrage at the Haitian king’s tyranny were largely a result of stories that Christophe had affronted British and American merchants in Haiti. However, after his death, Christophe’s despotism towards his own people was evidently seen as more acceptable in a number of British depictions. These memories of Christophe’s reign certainly did not celebrate the king’s perceived tyranny. Even reports that sought to defend the late king claimed that he had been a “great lover of power” and at times had acted as a “perfect tyrant”. But these reports still asserted the necessity of his severe rule for the progress of the post-slavery state by claiming that it was “exceedingly doubtful” whether the Haitians could be governed in a more liberal manner or whether they would “degenerate into perfect savages...without having some severe regulations established among them”.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} *The Traveller*, 7 December 1820.
\textsuperscript{111} *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle, July to December 1820*, vol. 90 (1820), 565-566.
\textsuperscript{112} *Imperial Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 30 (1821), 746-748.
As historians have highlighted, even abolitionists in the 1810s and 1820s stopped short of promoting a free-labour ideology in their calls for the emancipation of slaves. It has been argued that this was because abolitionists generally believed that slaves “required a long transition to absorb proper work habits, religion and civilization”. Free labour, therefore, “would be superior when and only when the slow-growing plant of ‘true liberty’ overcame, through ‘gradual amelioration’, the slave’s indolence and licentiousness”.\textsuperscript{113} Supporters of gradual emancipation pointed to the economically successful nature of Christophe’s reign to attest to the advantages that strict governance could bring to ex-slaves, who were deemed unsuited to and ill-equipped for more liberal forms of governance. In the immediate aftermath of the Haitian monarch’s death, some periodicals ran lengthy obituaries that alluded to Christophe’s cruelty but asserted that he was “just in his dispositions”.\textsuperscript{114} Christophe’s alleged “earnestness to advance the public welfare” was apparently enacted “too impetuously for the rough and unhinged condition of his new subjects”—a telling lesson for more radical abolitionists who were agitating for the immediate and total emancipation of slaves in British colonies.\textsuperscript{115} Such reports concluded that the Haitian king’s severity had been necessary and that he had still “attended to the welfare of his subjects”.\textsuperscript{116} Such reports ultimately offered justifications for his severe mode of rule that were largely absent in depictions of him while he was alive but which suited abolitionist discourses.

Despite these reported appraisals of his form of rule, other British newspapers were more unsympathetic to the memory of the Haitian monarch. A number of reports emphasised Christophe’s race as they referred to the revolution against his “dusky Majesty” and seemed to revel in the chaotic end to the black king’s reign.\textsuperscript{117} Even writers such as William Wordsworth—who had hitherto written poetry in support of Toussaint Louverture and who had expressed sympathy for

\textsuperscript{113} Drescher, \textit{Mighty Experiment}, 108.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Traveller}, 7 December 1820.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine}, vol. 9, no. 51 (1821), 267; Blackburn, \textit{Overthrow of Colonial Slavery}, 423.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Monthly Magazine, or British Register}, vol. 51, no. 350 (1821), 93.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{The Traveller}, 7 December 1820.
Haitian refugees—now openly mocked the demise of the black monarchy in writings such as “Queen and Negress Chaste and Fair”, a poem which sought to ridicule the arrival of Christophe’s wife and daughters to Thomas Clarkson’s household in England after the death of the Haitian king.\textsuperscript{118} Reports and literature such as this framed Christophe’s death as a fitting—and for some amusing—end to the carnivalesque sideshow that had been the Atlantic world’s first black monarchy. Reports would later claim that Christophe’s brother had been spotted queuing at the offices of London’s Mendicity Society—a charity established to keep beggars off the streets of London.\textsuperscript{119} Depictions such as these indicate a desire among some British commentators to both mock the presence of a black monarchy on the Atlantic stage and to revel in its demise.

These kinds of depictions certainly demand to be read as race-based reactions to the removal of the presence of a black monarch in the Atlantic world—a presence that, as explored in chapter three, a number of British loyalist observers at times found challenging and who therefore sought to distance the Haitian king from ‘traditional’ forms of monarchy like the British sovereign. However, as with American reports of the Haitian king’s death, Britain’s own concerns regarding political leadership and questions of legitimacy played an equally crucial role in how and why Christophe’s death was depicted the way it was in the early 1820s. In particular, by this time British loyalists had become increasingly eager to detach Britain ideologically from the so-called Holy Alliance. As Jay Sexton has argued, by the 1820s British loyalists tended to portray their own constitutional monarchy as “the ideal political system that occupied the middle ground between the extremes of American republicanism and the reactionary monarchy of the Holy Allies”.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118} This poem has been accurately described by Marcus Wood as “stupidly unpleasant”. For an analysis of the poem—and Wordsworth’s change of opinion since his writing on Toussaint—see Wood, \textit{The Poetry of Slavery}, 231-237.
\textsuperscript{120} Sexton, \textit{Monroe Doctrine}, 63.
newspapers therefore framed Christophe's death within discourses that warned against tyrannical forms of monarchical rule—and which in turn celebrated Britain's own constitutional monarchy—by emphasising that the Haitian king's demise had come as a direct consequence of the severe modes of rule he had adopted. In reports such as these and unlike those that saw some merit in his harsh forms of governance, his tyranny was far from justified. Rather, it was portrayed as a form of rule that should be universally rebuked and which justified his unruly end. Newspapers reminded readers that Christophe had “exercised a sway entirely despotic” and that he had “long been odious to his subjects, for the capricious tyranny which marked every part of his administration, and the deeds of bloody cruelty with which it was often stained”.121 His governance was remembered as rendering the people to “a state to which no slavery could be compared”.122 Christophe’s death, such reports summarised, was a direct result of his actions as he “fell a victim to the disaffection excited by his own enormities”.123 In this way, the revolt against the Haitian monarch was projected by British newspapers as an example of the self-defeating nature of repressive forms of rule—a pertinent observation for British loyalists witnessing the despotism of European sovereigns and who were also aware of increasing agitation towards Britain’s own political leaders.

British radicals from the early 1820s would more explicitly outline the demise of the Haitian king as a lesson for what they deemed to be Britain’s own oppressive political regime. As historians have noted, throughout the 1810s the voices of Britain’s working classes were being muted considerably and government policies of repression “rather than reconciliation remained a consistent feature of the overall picture”.124 In particular, the massacre at Peterloo in 1819 in which

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121 *The Edinburgh Annual Register for 1820*, vol. 13 (1823), 323-325; *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics and Literature of the Year 1820* (1822), 244.

122 *Observer*, 10 December 1820.

123 *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal...January to April, inclusive, 1821*, vol. 94 (1821), 443.

military authorities charged into tens of thousands of protesters calling for parliamentary reform—killing 15 people—served to strengthen British radicals’ portrayal of a British government intent on stifling any liberal or reformist voices. In the wake of Peterloo, radicals saw the bloody events as proof that “there was now no choice but that between republican government and military despotism”. The resulting Gagging Acts, passed in December 1819, aimed to subdue those who wrote or published anti-establishment material. The unpopularity of the Prince Regent had also intensified after his “public exoneration” of the officials complicit in the Peterloo Massacre. Radicals and reformers saw this as further proof of the Regent’s lack of care for the welfare of his subjects and this “revitalised popular anger” towards him. Prominent radical writers such as Robert Wedderburn and Richard Carlile wrote even more vociferously against the Regent’s actions in the aftermath of Peterloo and depicted his perceived support of the events in Manchester as a “monarchic death rattle”. In this way, even before his accession to the throne one year later, public opinion against the Regent was firmly not in his favour.

Reform movements had quietened considerably in Britain by 1820—partly due to the ‘success’ of the Gagging Acts and the subsequent imprisonment of a number of prominent radical figures. Nonetheless, the successful rebellion against the Haitian king afforded an opportunity for some radical writers and thinkers to more indiscreetly project their agitations aimed at what they deemed to be an oppressive British government and monarchy. By 1820, the radical press had already largely celebrated the news of successful revolutions in countries such as Portugal and Naples as they perceived these to be a blow to oppressive regimes and restrictive political ideologies everywhere. When news of the successful revolution against the Haitian monarch emerged by the

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125 Chase, 1820, 52. For a detailed analysis of how Peterloo became such a central frame of reference in British imaginations in 1819 see Chandler, England in 1819.
126 Epstein, Radical Expression, 105.
127 Poole, Politics of Regicide, 154.
128 Ibid.
129 Thomis and Holt, Threats of Revolution, 82; Chandler, England in 1819, 22.
130 Jarrett, Congress of Vienna, 239; Chase, 1820, 166-168.
end of 1820, some radical observers sought to align Christophe’s death in a celebratory narrative of anti-monarchy revolution. If “revolution is attempted when reform movements are stifled”, a number of British radical observers looked to events in Haiti in 1820 to further underline the kind of revolutionary movement that could and should take place when citizens are subjected to governmental oppression.\footnote{Thomis and Holt, \textit{Threats of Revolution}, 62.}

The poignancy that the latter days of Christophe’s reign held for some British radical observers was captured in J. H. Amherst’s often-overlooked play from 1821, \textit{The Death of Christophe, Ex-King of Hayti}.\footnote{Houghton Library, Harvard University, TS 3111. 225, J. H. Amherst, \textit{The Death of Christophe, Ex-King of Hayti: A Drama in Three Acts} (1821).} Although little is known about Amherst, the play is remarkable for its portrayal of monarchical tyranny, of the virtues of republican revolution, and for its regicidal undertones at a time of such hostility towards both the British government and monarch. Historians have claimed that Amherst was responsible for a number of plays staged at the Royal Coburg in the early 1820s and \textit{The Death of Christophe} was first staged here on 29 January 1821.\footnote{John Booth, \textit{A Century of Theatrical History, 1816-1916: The "Old Vic"} (London: Stead’s Publishing House, 1917), 17; David Worrall, \textit{Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment} (New York: Routledge, 2015), 71.} The Coburg’s capacity—said to be approximately 3,800—was one of the largest of London’s theatres at the time and Amherst’s play was staged here for a number of weeks in 1821.\footnote{Worrall, \textit{Harlequin Empire}, 69.} The play is noteworthy for a number of reasons, not least among them that it is the earliest known on-stage characterisation of two of Haiti’s leading political figures —Christophe and Boyer—in English. With Amherst’s portrayal of the revolution against Christophe appearing on stage only months after news of Christophe’s death had reached British audiences, the uprising in Haiti was evidently an event that Amherst believed had captured the imaginations of the British public. The play was revived in 1822 and yet again in 1825, when the lead role of Christophe was
played for the first time by a black actor—the American, Ira Aldridge.\textsuperscript{135}
Although it is of course impossible to attest to audience numbers for the play, the fact that the Coburg was willing to revisit Amherst’s drama on multiple occasions appears to be testament to its enduring popularity and resonance with British audiences.

The Royal Coburg is said to have been “the most exciting and innovative playhouse in London at that time”, despite the fact that the theatre had been the victim of increasing litigation that restricted the performance of shows deemed unsuitable by the Examiner of Plays—a governmental official whose responsibility it was to decide which theatrical productions were ‘acceptable’.\textsuperscript{136} The Coburg was one of a growing number of illegitimate theatres in London that had opened during such strict regulation and apparently avoided litigation through its staging of burletta and pantomime—forms which were allowed by the Examiner.\textsuperscript{137} However, the Coburg still became known as the “Blood Tub” for its “penschant for staging violent, sensational melodrama” and the theatre was said to relish “theatrical, moral and political brinkmanship”.\textsuperscript{138} The “anti-Regent” Coburg had already been prosecuted by 1820 for its production of \textit{King Richard III}—a dramatisation of the infamous story of a successful rebellion against a British king.\textsuperscript{139} This was in keeping with like-minded theatres in London in this time that staged productions that sought to criticise monarchical rule and traditional forms of political power. These included Drury Lane’s 1821 production of \textit{Don Giovanni}—a play audiences allegedly would have recognised as a “mischievous satire on George IV”—and numerous productions of \textit{Jack and

\textsuperscript{136} John Larpe held this position from 1778-1824. For an overview of his time as Examiner of the Plays see David Worrall, \textit{Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship, and Romantic Period Subcultures 1773-1832} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 103-132.
\textsuperscript{137} Worrall, \textit{Harlequin Empire}, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{139} Worrall, \textit{Theatric Revolution}, 210; Chase, \textit{1820}, 73.
the Beanstalk with its “radical overtones of giant-killing”. Outside of London—and therefore outside of the jurisdiction of the Examiner of Plays—other theatres put on dramas such as Coriolanus, thereby bringing to the stage the story of a successful revolution against a tyrannical government.

Despite appearing at such a renowned venue and in the midst of a plethora of politically-charged productions throughout London, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been paid to Amherst’s Death of Christophe. David Worrall has supplied the most extensive discussion of the play, particularly focusing on the lack of any notable race-based criticism of Christophe—something that confirms for Worrall the Coburg’s interest in and support for non-white cultures at this time. However, while Worrall claims to be disappointed that the play “failed to make any profound or even topical commentary” on Christophe and his death, the way in which the play acts as a celebration of the overthrow of monarchical rule and as a warning against stifling public calls for reform is overlooked in his analysis. Although Worrall briefly considers that the play “might be said to be concerned with the universal theme of the overthrow of tyranny”, this is in fact a central part of Amherst’s drama. From the very beginning of the play, Christophe’s tyrannical nature is asserted far more than his race as he is described as “a tyrant that disgraces human nature”. The monarch is referred to throughout the play in a variety of guises. He is said to be “hard-hearted”; “the resemblance of the devil”; “the tyrant who lives but on his peoples [sic] misery”; and “the scourge of mankind”. Amherst even alludes to the well-known thumb-screw scandal that was so pivotal in turning British opinion against Christophe by including a scene in which an alleged revolutionary is tortured using the “singing screws”. In these ways, Christophe the tyrant—a figure well known to the British public by 1821—lived up to his reputation in Amherst’s play.

140 Chase, 1820, 74.
141 Moody, Illegitimate Theatre, 108; Chase, 1820, 74.
142 Worrall, Harlequin Empire, 71-77.
143 Geggus, “Haiti and the Abolitionists,” 125.
Rather than simply reaffirming Christophe’s lack of popularity, however, the play also demands to be considered in the context of a time of social unrest in Britain that was largely directed at the new British monarch and at the increasingly oppressive and restrictive measures of the British government—both targets for growing vitriolic criticism in British radical circles. As Chandler has highlighted, by 1820 reformers and radicals viewed Britain’s political leadership as “a form of tyranny posing as a form of self-rule”. Public feeling towards George IV was so hostile that in the late 1810s a crowd of Londoners who were frustrated by his indifference to their concerns had attacked the then-Regent. This violence towards the Prince Regent elicited little criticism from the radical press and ministers would be constantly fearful of similar attacks occurring in the future. Malcolm Chase has suggested that the Coburg’s audiences of plays such as Coriolanus—Shakespeare’s portrayal of the downfall of a ruler at the will of the people—would have been explicitly aware of “the ambiguities of its treatment of political power” and the same must certainly be said of those who witnessed Amherst’s portrayal of the revolution against the Haitian monarchy. The death of a New World king who invited little sympathy from Britain’s ruling classes offered the Coburg a unique opportunity to stage a play that overtly celebrated a revolution against a monarch—an opportunity that was routinely denied to the Coburg and London theatres in general at a time of increasingly autocratic regulation.

Christophe’s race was deliberately downplayed in the play to enable this criticism of despotic political power to be universalised and to resonate more powerfully with its British audience. Amherst explicitly depicted a monarch out of touch with the needs of his people and unwilling to listen to calls for reform. The very first time the famed Haitian monarch appeared to the audience was when they witnessed his idea of justice as he dealt with a petitioner by shooting him on the spot—an act he justified to his wife as a “warning lesson” to “those rebellious subjects who would abuse their monarch with perpetual

144 Chandler, England in 1819, 30.
145 Poole, Politics of Regicide, 145-146.
146 Chase, 1820, 75.
petitioning. This was a pertinent issue for British reformers, who had by this time become increasingly frustrated with the British government's refusal to discuss their own petitions throughout the 1810s. Prominent radicals such as Hunt and Cobbett from the 1810s had vocally promoted the power and significance of petitioning. However, since his time as Regent, George IV had constantly ignored petitions and calls for reform—something that led to such indignation among some ultra-radical observers that they openly projected regicidal imaginings as a result.

In addition, the portrayal of Christophe's willingness to answer petitions only if they arrived with some form of bribery was a further ongoing point of concern for British reformers exasperated with the continuing system of 'Old Corruption' in British politics—a “parasitic political system” in which governmental and public funds were used to further the self-interests of Members of Parliament. According to Philip Harling, 'Old Corruption' in the early nineteenth century thus became “a metaphor for systematic political oppression”. In Amherst’s play, King Christophe embodied this corrupt mode of leadership by responding to any threat of insurrection or agitation with oppression and the imprisonment of anyone whom he felt had the “spirit of rebellion” within them—a striking parallel to the increasingly harsh sentences that were handed down to British radicals accused of sedition or blasphemy. Christophe was portrayed as being happy for such “reptiles” to “rot in dungeons” and anyone who questioned his form of governing was threatened with a similar fate—or worse. Ultimately, Christophe was depicted in the play as a monarch struggling to deal with the

147 Amherst, Death of Christophe, Act 1, f. 19.
149 Poole, Politics of Regicide, 143-148.
151 Ibid., 99.
152 Amherst, Death of Christophe, Act 2, f. 14.
currents of rebellion sweeping through his kingdom—a narrative with a domestic pertinence that would not have been lost on the Coburg's radically-leaning audience.

In contrast to the waning popularity of the British monarch—and the government as a whole—at this time, George IV's estranged and embattled wife Caroline continued to enjoy a significant amount of support, particularly among the British working class. The attempts by George IV and his ministers to isolate Caroline from the public domain and to defame her character only served to intensify support for the British queen—and opposition to the king—among British radicals. For reformers, the Queen Caroline Affair served as an explicit example of the level of oppression and corruption at work in both Parliament and the monarchy. Worrall claims that the majority of the actors, staff and audiences at the Coburg were very public supporters of Queen Caroline—so much so that when one of its most prominent comedians took to the stage one evening in November 1820 he succeeding in raising three cheers for the victimised queen. The pro-Caroline nature of the Coburg was such that Caroline allegedly visited the theatre on at least one occasion in 1821. Whether Caroline was aware of Amherst's play at the same theatre in the same year as her visit is of course unknown, but she would have likely found his depiction of the Haitian monarch's wife favourable to say the least.

Amherst's portrayal of Christophe's wife in the Death of Christophe displayed an acute awareness of this support for the estranged Queen of Great Britain and Ireland as he presented the figure of the Haitian queen as analogous to Queen Caroline. Christophe's wife—named "Alraida" in the play—was portrayed throughout as a rare voice of reason and one who tried to save the king from his impending fate, despite his harsh treatment towards her. As with radical portrayals of Caroline, the virtues of Alraida provided a direct contrast to her

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153 Chase, *1820*, 158.  
155 Worrall, *Harlequin Empire*, 68.  
tyrannical husband and allowed the Haitian king’s wife to be cast as a kind of “counter-monarch”—in much the same way that British radicals portrayed Caroline in the early 1820s.\footnote{For an overview of how British radicals supported Caroline and used her as a symbolic figure in their denunciations of George IV and of the British monarchy in general see McCalman, \textit{Radical Underworld}, 162-177; Epstein, \textit{Radical Expression}, 157.} Alraida allowed Amherst to more subtly underline the inhumane and uncompassionate nature of monarchs. In her very first scene, the queen’s caring nature provided a stark contrast to the king, especially when she begged him to consider the welfare of his subjects and directly asked him “[w]here can they fly but the monarch for relief?”. Alraida implored the king to “gain [the people’s] love”—something that George IV was failing ever more to do in Britain at this time.\footnote{Amherst, \textit{Death of Christophe}, Act 1, f. 20.} The caring nature of Alraida was exemplified in the final scene of the first act when she tried desperately to save the life of an elderly blind prisoner that Christophe had demanded be shot on accusations of treachery. By the end of the play—with Christophe’s demise all the more certain—it was Alraida who again provided the empathy and foresight that the king lacked, instructing him that “the people...will never more be thine”, if he continued on this path of tyranny.\footnote{Amherst, \textit{Death of Christophe}, Act 3, f. 4.}

\textit{The Death of Christophe} presented British audiences not only with the portrayal of a tyrannical king falling on his own sword but also with an image of Haitians as the architects of their own liberty in an age of oppression—something that, the play suggested, qualified them as legitimate recipients of the virtues of a more liberal form of government. The Coburg apparently had a penchant for dramatisations of struggles for freedom from political oppression. As well as restaging Amherst’s play multiple times in the early 1820s, the theatre also presented its audience with a drama that positively portrayed the Greek fight for independence in 1823.\footnote{Worrall, \textit{Harlequin Empire}, 68.} The staging of plays that celebrated revolutionary movements abroad, such as the revolution in Greece, was in keeping with the celebratory tone with which British radicals used to speak about the European...
revolutions of the early 1820s. For example in 1820, in alehouses British radicals applauded and toasted the revolutions of Portugal and Naples, while they simultaneously attacked the oppressive policies of the British government.  

Amherst’s play sought to contribute to this rhetoric by situating the rebellion against Christophe and its liberal undertones alongside the European revolutions of the early 1820s. Although this alignment was not explicit, the narratives presented in the play spoke to universal themes of political reform and liberal revolution. In the very first scene of the Death of Christophe one of Boyer’s soldiers spoke of troops who “may conquer in the cause of humanity or die bravely fighting for the rights of liberty”. This same soldier scolded those who were opposed to or showed indifference to the revolution by asserting that “in the hour our liberties are threatened they neither deserve house nor home who wont [sic] absolutely stand forward to defend both”.  

Even though the presence of Boyer was sparse (Amherst instead focused his attention on Christophe’s court and the troops of Boyer) Haiti’s new leader emerged to the audience at the beginning of the play and addressed his troops by claiming that:

...our cause is that of human nature[,] no eloquence is needed to shew [sic] the policy or justice of aiming to exterminate a monster trampling on the rights of fair humanity and mercilessly weltering in his subjects [sic] blood. The universal cry is raised against Christophe[,] before whom age is no protection, infancy no power to move to pity. Onward Gentlemen, the eye of heaven is on us smilingly—our country-men regard us with hearts all filled by glorious hope and expectation...the universal voice must in the end prevail and crush to nothingness the mean and selfish wretches who delude the Monarch and oppress the people.

In this way Amherst framed the fight against Christophe as one that was more universally recognised as one in the name of liberty. Importantly, with memories

161 Chase, 1820, 166-168.
162 Amherst, Death of Christophe, Act 1, f. 7.
163 Ibid., f. 11.
of Peterloo still fresh in the minds of British audiences, passages such as these highlighted the notion of a ‘revolution from below’ and the importance of popular activism in affecting meaningful political reform. The rebellion against Christophe was shown to embody the same liberal ideas as those found in the revolutions of Europe and in British radicals’ dreams of political reform. Amherst’s play therefore sought to legitimise the Haitians’ struggle to liberate themselves from the stranglehold of monarchical oppression—a struggle being witnessed throughout Europe and one that some radicals hoped would gain traction in Britain.

The parallels between the fated king of Haiti and the threat of rebellion found in Europe and Britain were highlighted more explicitly in a print by the renowned radical printer and publisher, John Fairburn. Dated February 1821—only one month after Amherst’s play hit the stage—Fairburn’s *The Ghost of Christophe Ex-King of Hayti, appearing to the Un-Holy Alliance!!* depicted Christophe in an equally less than flattering light. As Rosalie McCrea has noted, the print depicts Christophe as a “tyrannical monster”.\(^\text{164}\) Fairburn drew attention to Christophe’s blackness with caricaturised facial features and the ex-monarch was depicted as an exotic version of Old World monarchy. More than this, the Haitian king’s death was clearly depicted as one that benefited the country as a whole. In the background, a black figure proclaims joyously “Tank God de d___n tyrant be dead and poor slave be at liberty”. The figure appears to be in the process of standing up from the kneeling position and is highly evocative of the famous “Am I not a Man and a Brother?” medallions of the British abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth century.\(^\text{165}\) By drawing on this famous image of abolitionism, Fairburn clearly suggested that the subjects of such an oppressive regime as

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\(^{164}\) McCrea, "Portrait Mythology?,” 69.

\(^{165}\) Marcus Wood has highlighted how the image became synonymous with the anti-slave trade movement and was reproduced in literature, on newspaper headings, and even in ceramic figures: Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 22. It is also worth noting that in the 1810s the image was also appropriated by other British radicals to suggest that Britain’s working classes were no better off than the slaves of the Caribbean: Wood, *Radical Satire*, 211-214.
Christophe's were no better off than slaves. Christophe's death therefore was the final act of emancipation for which Haitians were waiting.

Figure 4. British Museum, BM Satires number 14123, John Fairburn, The Ghost of Christophe, ex-King of Hayti, Appearing to the Un-Holy Alliance!!, (1821).

In this print, Fairburn presented Christophe's death as a fable akin to the one presented in Amherst's play. The character and actions of the fallen Haitian monarch were explicitly aligned with those of the members of the Holy Alliance as well as the British monarch. The ghost of the Haitian king emerges to the monarchs of Europe as blood pours from the self-inflicted wound from his pistols. Christophe offers the weapons to the European monarchs, declaring: “Unworthy members of a cursed league, take those and die and follow if thou canst a tyrant's fate”. That Christophe’s fate was the one that would follow all monarchical tyrants is emphasised by the lack of physical distance between Haiti and Europe—a distance shortened by Christophe who strides between the continents. By inviting the European monarchs to share in Christophe's fate, Fairburn implied that Britain and Europe's own people were being subjected to
the same kinds of oppressive regimes as that of Christophe's Haiti—regimes that rendered their subjects to an enslaved state. Fairburn optimistically hoped that the death of the Haitian king would be the catalyst for a change in the ways of Britain's own monarch. In the print, George IV sits with a discarded "Plan of Reform by John Bull" at his feet. However, the presence of the ghost of the fallen Haitian king leads him to proclaim: "By all the glorious points upon my Stars, by all the glory of my triple Crown I like not this, Black King...be off – the Holy League I'll quit[,] reform my life[,] Kick off my Ministers[,] and love my wife". In this way, Fairburn optimistically saw the death of the Haitian monarch as a lesson for Europe's increasingly oppressive monarchical regimes—a lesson he hoped would be heeded by Britain's own sovereign.

Boyer's Republicanism and the New Promise of Haiti for British Radicals

Although Fairburn's print was a radical—and, possibly for some loyalists, a rather challenging—way to celebrate the end of a tyrannical regime, the idea that Christophe's death and Boyer's succession had 'emancipated' the Haitians further was mirrored in a number of newspapers and periodicals in Britain at the time. British newspapers circulated the same kinds of reports that abounded in the American press of the "rejoicings" of the Haitian people at the implementation of a more "free and liberal government" and that the popularity of this new government was "unbounded".166 Around the same time that Fairburn's print was published, another image emerged in London's publishing houses that similarly alluded to Haiti as a unique site of liberty at a time when the ruling classes in Britain and throughout Europe were looking to stifle the increasingly vocal calls for reform. Created by William Heath and published by Samuel William Fores—a specialist in satirical prints and caricature—in January 1821, The Secrets of Trop-peau disclosed: or the Imbecile Alliance of Tyranny to Crush the Universal Spirit of Liberty defeated optimistically depicted the Holy

166 Morning Chronicle, 25 December 1820; Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post, 4 January 1821.
Alliance as failing to subdue the revolutionary spirit sweeping Europe.\textsuperscript{167} This print adopted a less radical approach than Fairburn’s in that it excluded George IV from this alliance and, in fact, claimed that Britain was a model example of liberal progress.

More significantly than this, however, was how post-Christophe Haiti was again situated as an aspirational model of liberal progression. As the autocratic rulers of Europe struggle to suffocate the flames of revolution, an angel above them issues a stark warning: “Tyrants beware—the spirit of freedom is come forth & woe to them who dare oppose its progress. Mark England, America, Domingo...& look to it. Russia, Prussia & Austria, not even the walls of China shall long arrest its march”. While the three monarchs oppressively sit on top of the European nations, “Domingo” (along with South America) rises above in the centre background, apparently freed by these angels of liberty. Although Haiti was far from being the main focus of the print, this image nonetheless demonstrates how the rebellion against Christophe and Haiti’s shift to a republican form of governance gained a poignancy for some British observers in the more general narrative of the ‘universal spirit of liberty’ that was seen to be sweeping across the Atlantic world at this time. As the print suggests, Haiti’s new republic was an envious distance from the destructive designs of Europe’s oppressive monarchs—something that was also highlighted in publications such as the \textit{Monthly Review}, which claimed that “[f]ortunately for the independence of the Haytians, they are beyond the reach of the Royal Menagerie, or Holy Alliance, as it is profanely called”.\textsuperscript{168} In this way, some observers in Britain clearly believed that the socio-political conditions across the Atlantic were perhaps more favourable for Haiti’s newly-acquired liberty from political oppression than the traditionally restrictive conditions found in Europe.


\textsuperscript{168} \textit{The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal, January to April, inclusive, 1821}, vol. 94 (1821), 443.
Articles that appeared in Richard Carlile's radical publication The Republican in the early 1820s also asserted the importance of Haiti’s fight for liberty. Carlile was a prominent voice in British radical circles and a staunch advocate of republican principles. “Principled, passionate and personally reckless”, Carlile’s writing by the end of the 1810s had become increasingly anti-monarchical and from the late 1810s he had been at the centre of a resurgence in the promotion of Paineite republican ideology as British radicals increasingly leaned towards “an outright commitment to revolutionary republicanism”. This made him a prime suspect in the British government’s crackdown on radical

169 For an overview of Carlile’s life and his writing see Joel H. Wierner, Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1983); Epstein, Radical Expression, 100-146; Thompson, English Working Class, 837-846.
170 Chase, 1820, 18; Epstein, Radical Expression, 103.
publications and it was a position that eventually caught up with Carlile at the end of 1819 as he was imprisoned for six years for printing works of Thomas Paine. Carlile’s first real engagement with Haiti came with a report on the death of Christophe that appeared on 15 December 1820 in The Republican—a publication that James Epstein has described as “one of the most outstanding radical journals of the nineteenth century”. Unsurprisingly, the report was unsympathetic to the demise of a king who was “not deficient in all the necessary qualifications to make a monarchical despot”. Carlile did, however, offer some praise for the ex-king by claiming that he had been a “great patron of education” and that his “sole object was the improvement of the negro world”—leading Carlile to assert Christophe’s legitimacy as a monarch and one who “ruled his kingdom with more ability than any of his European brothers”.

Despite such concessions to the positive impact of Christophe’s rule, in this article Carlile reserved larger praise for the rebellion against the Haitian monarchy. In keeping with British narratives that supported the revolution, The Republican claimed that it had resulted in the “further emancipation of the negroes of Hayti”. For Carlile, Haiti was proof that “the popery of monarchy can no longer be tolerated” and that it could “only be considered the bauble and relic of the darkest times which the progress of knowledge has taught us to reject”. In this way, the demise of the Haitian monarchy represented hope that the insurrections such as those found in Europe would continue their march—something that Carlile optimistically predicted that the “allied banditti of kings” in Europe were powerless to halt. Carlile was less optimistic about the potential for meaningful political change in Britain but Haiti’s revolution and its abolition of monarchy appeared to provide a genuine source of comfort because “[w]hilst we are almost sickened by hope deferred at home, our languor is occasionally dissipated by the success of the advocates of liberty, and the friends of the human race abroad”. Carlile’s message was clear: while Englishmen foolishly “affect an attachment to monarchy”, the Haitians were proof not only of the

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171 Epstein, Radical Expression, 109.
172 The Republican, 15 December 1820, 564-565.
universal desire for progressive and republican ideals but also of the capacity of the common man to implement this change.

Only a month later, Carlile’s “A New Year’s Address to the Reformers of Great Britain” re-emphasised his praise for the new Haitian republic by asserting that it “promises a fine example to all the West India Islands, in the abolition of monarchical despotism and the establishment of the Representative System of Government, with an elective presidency as the executive”. Carlile felt comforted by Haiti’s turn to republicanism and even went so far to claim that it had “amply dispelled the gloom of our more immediate interests at home”. This article also sought to align the success of the Haitian revolutionaries with the “triumph of the Queen over the conspiracy against her life and honour” leading Carlile to proclaim that “[w]e have conjointly worked us half a revolution”. In this way, Carlile began to explicitly align the revolutionary events in Haiti with the undercurrent of rebellion in Britain and to portray Haiti as a source of inspiration for those who agitated for political reform.

Once Haiti’s establishment of republicanism had been cemented in 1822 with the overthrow of colonial Spain in the west of Hispaniola, however, Carlile engaged more directly with the promise that Boyer’s Haiti now held as a site of post-revolution liberty. As Poole has demonstrated, the “radical critique of monarchy adopted a more overtly republican tone after Peterloo” and this can certainly be seen in Carlile’s writing on Haiti in the early 1820s. In a lengthy article published in the The Republican in December 1822, Carlile used the new republic as a valuable space on to which the virtues of republicanism could be projected. The title of the article—“To the Republicans of the Island of Hayti”—was borrowed from earlier articles that had appeared in The Republican that were addressed “To the Republicans of the Island of Great Britain”. However, these articles—written from within his prison cell—were being circulated at a time when strict regulations had been imposed which disallowed cheap publications

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173 The Republican, 1 January 1 1821, 3.  
174 Poole, Politics of Regicide, 154.
such as *The Republican* from commenting on matters of religion or the state.\textsuperscript{175} Haiti thus briefly became a valuable source of reflection and Carlile used his faux address to the Haitians as a vehicle through which he could more explicitly outline the steps and legislation necessary to establish a successful, legitimate republic.

Carlile used this address to outline both his hopes for the continuation of Europe’s revolutions, and his frustrations that Britain had not followed such a course—a course defined in part by Haiti’s republican revolutionaries. Though Carlile claimed to possess “a pure republican spirit” he lamented that he was surrounded by “slaves and cowards” who he hoped would follow the example set by “the once slaves but now free Republicans of Hayti”. Britain’s “corrupt...tyrannical and...unpopular government” was claimed to affect “a hauteur to [Haiti’s] government” but Carlile asserted his belief that “the majority of people of this Island have already a kindred spirit with you”.\textsuperscript{176} The article spoke optimistically and passionately of being “on the eve of the bursting forth of a revolutionary volcano” despite the attempts of Europe’s sovereigns to prevent it.\textsuperscript{177} Carlile hoped that this revolutionary spirit would continue to spread in the Americas—particularly in Jamaica and Cuba. He implored the Haitians to “stir up a republican spirit in Cuba” in order to affect a “fraternity” between the neighbouring islands. In this way, Carlile situated Haiti as a political model in his visions of a global revolution and the “extinction of monarchy”.\textsuperscript{178}

But the main purpose that ‘To the Republicans of Hayti’ served was as a wide-ranging set of guidelines for the new republic that were in fact a thinly-veiled, vitriolic indictment of British politics and society. As Michael J. Turner has argued, radicals “wanted to get to the roots of political, social and economic problems” and “the reforms they sought were usually fundamental and

\textsuperscript{175} Chase, 1820, 17.
\textsuperscript{176} *The Republican*, 20 December 1822, 929.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 932.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 930.
structural, not merely superficial or comestic”. At a time of “economic distress” for Britain, Carlile’s ‘advice’ to the new Haitian state reflected the practical guidelines he believed were necessary for a progressive state to operate successfully and beneficially to its citizens. To Carlile, Boyer’s Haiti had the potential to be a republican utopia—but only if it heeded the shortcomings of Britain’s own broken political system. Carlile instructed Haitians that while they should stir up revolution in their neighbouring islands and seek to avail them of colonial rule, they should not seek to expand their own territory as colonialism only served to “enrich a few individuals at the expense [sic] of the many”. The article highlighted the necessity of implementing “a system of finance that shall occasion [sic] the smallest amount of taxation”—a system that would be “incalculable” to the benefit of the nation. Carlile touched on a number of guidelines including the eradication of religion on the island and the necessity of annual elections for government ministers. He advised the “distinguished Citizens of Hayti” that “the form of your government can never be rendered too simple” and that they should avoid modelling their republic on the “complicated system” of America and instead look to Spain’s new republican constitution for guidance.

References to the pitfalls of colonialism, high taxation, religion and to infrequent general elections were all matters of concern for the British working class in the early nineteenth century. Of even greater importance to Carlile’s assertion for the prosperity of the Haitian republic was the establishment and protection of a free press—hardly surprising as Carlile was writing from prison at the time. Carlile used the address to the Haitian republicans to passionately defend the “perfect freedom” that a free press gives its citizens. Carlile highlighted the importance of this in helping to educate the nation—something that was “the

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181 *The Republican*, 20 December 1822, 930.
182 Ibid., 936.
183 Ibid., 935.
source of all prosperity and human improvement”. In a thinly-veiled attack on the short-sightedness and autocracy of Britain’s sedition laws, Carlile advised Haitians that if they supported freedom of press while ‘other’ countries did not, it would be they who would “soon become the most powerful nation on this globe”.

Whether Carlile genuinely believed or even wanted Haiti to become a significant political power in the Atlantic world is unclear—particularly since after this article there is little evidence of further engagement by Carlile on the subject of Haiti. However, as Richard Ashcraft has highlighted, radical thinkers tended to highlight “a sense of fraternity and communal obligation” as opposed to “the arbitrariness of individual self-interest”. And in this vein Carlile’s closing salvo indicated a very real desire for Haiti to succeed and to act as an advertisement for the progressive nature of republicanism everywhere. Carlile implored the Haitians to “make your Island the center of intelligence, humanity, and political wisdom” and to “pronounce your Island as a hospitable asylum for every moral industrious man who will enter it”. He predicted that Haiti’s significance to the Americas would be the same as Britain’s to Europe—that of an “independent, powerful, and even invincible government”. The article claimed that the Haitians were “free from any annoyance from Europe” and that little could stop their further advancement. Carlile signed off his address by attempting to leave his reader in no doubt of his support and sense of fraternity with the Haitian republic: “Do well: deserve well, and farewell, is the ardent desire of your com-patriot [sic] and well-wisher”.

It is worth noting that “To the Republicans” shares striking similarities with a text produced and published in England only a few years earlier. Written anonymously, and published by the “radically inclined” Sherwood, Neely, and Jones in 1817, the Poetical Epistle to the King of Hayti was another set of

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184 Ibid., 939.
186 The Republican, 20 December 1822, 941.
guidelines addressed to the Haitians of how their nation could prosper politically and socially, and how it could assert itself as a legitimate nation of liberal ideology. Although the Epistle was written while Christophe was alive, it functioned in a similar way to Carlile’s text as a scathing critique of British government and society. The author of the Epistle, like Carlile, looked to the Haitian nation as a kind of political clean slate and one which could avoid the frustrations and anxieties that had been thrust upon the British working classes of the early nineteenth century. Despite the assertion that Haiti should adopt a similar parliamentary system to Britain’s, in a similar vein to Carlile’s guidelines, the author instructed Christophe to “let all the members, sire, yearly be sent in”—surely an allusion to the fact that, by the date of the text’s publication, the previous British election had been in 1812 while the one before that had been in 1807. The poem would also more directly scorn Britain’s corrupted electoral system by advising Christophe: “Do not choose a man for a borough that’s rotten / Do not let your ministers buy a majority”. At a time of such economic distress for Britain, Christophe was also warned to “not, as our state hath unhappily done / Permit your expence [sic] to exceed the income” otherwise he would “suffer the people to suffer starvation / By prodigal waste and excessive taxation”. In this way, the author saw Haiti as an opportunity to create a governmental system free from the entrenched corruption of Britain’s political leadership.

In addition to the perceived flaws of the British Parliament, the advice offered to Christophe and Haiti was a wide-ranging list of everything that was perceived to be wrong with British—and in particular, London—society at this time. The growing effects of Britain’s Industrial Revolution were lamented as the text advised Christophe that “the best friend you have in the isle [is] Agriculture”. The damaging consequences of the overcrowding of cities in Britain was highlighted and Christophe was advised to “not let a city become overgrown”. London was depicted as morally-corrupt and a city both literally and figuratively in decay. Prostitutes “walk the street” amid “concourse[s] of idle men” who “should work

187 Worrall, Theatric Revolution, 6.
188 A Poetical Epistle to the King of Hayti (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1817), 14-17.
on the farm”. Haiti was advised to bridge the class divide that was so evident in England and to not allow the wealthy to “grind the face of the poor”. British reliance on nepotism in the military was similarly advised to be avoided and to instead “Give the laurel to those who the laurel may merit”. By the end of this canto, neither Haiti nor Christophe were directly referred to by name—a device which allowed the author to hide behind the guise of an “epistle to Haiti” but to also allow the text to be interpreted as advice to the British monarch. The canto culminated in a final warning: “To neglect this advice, Sire, will be a state blunder”, thereby more overtly outlining the dangers for British prosperity and the potential for Haiti to even surpass Britain as a legitimate, politically progressive and morally centred Atlantic world nation.\textsuperscript{189}

As with so many radicals of the time, a primary concern for the author of the \textit{Epistle} was the role of education in the general betterment of society.\textsuperscript{190} The author devoted the third canto to the importance of implementing education systems that were for the good of the entire nation, including the working class. The notion of ignorance in Haiti was asserted as “a more deadly foe…than France” whereas “learning” was introduced as “that true friend”. The advice to “[c]arefully educate the young” and the significance of all learning, from reading to astronomy, from arithmetic to poetry was highlighted as essential for the sustained improvement of society as a whole. Yet again, however, the author deliberately obfuscated the intended recipient of this didacticism. Although the author imagined “If I were the king of Hayti” it is easy to picture his or her desire to write “If I were the king of England” as the text again began to outline advice for Haiti that was in fact a reflection of the failures of the British establishment. Despite the text continuing to advise Christophe to “teach all who need” the author was probably well aware that Christophe had in fact already begun to implement an education system throughout Haiti that was designed to benefit

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 16-17.
\textsuperscript{190} In the first two decades of the 1800s, education for all and the “value and power of knowledge” became an increasingly important issue for radical movements throughout England: Harold Silver, \textit{English Education and the Radicals, 1780-1850} (London: Routledge, 1975), 50.
News of Christophe adopting the Lancasterian system was commonplace in British newspapers between 1816 and 1817, and so the reference to this system in the poem—and the importance of education in general—should be read as a suggestion by the author that Christophe was succeeding where British governments had failed and that British philanthropy by the likes of Wilberforce and Clarkson towards Haiti should in fact be directed closer to home.

The *Poetical Epistle* and Carlile’s writing in the *Republican* are evidence of the way in which the idea of Haiti as a potential political utopia—one far removed from the entrenched corruption and decay of Britain—was used by some British radicals to project their desire for effective, progressive forms of governance. The promise that Haiti held in some British reformist imaginations is further exemplified by the fact that Jeremy Bentham felt compelled to send a copy of his *Codification Proposal* to Boyer in December 1822—coincidentally the same month that Carlile published his own advice to Haiti in *The Republican*. Bentham’s *Proposal*—an attempt at rewriting existing systems of law that Bentham viewed as incompatible with liberal ideas of progress—was printed only months before a copy was sent to Boyer. From the early 1800s Bentham had concerned himself with the constitutional affairs of Europe and Latin America, something that intensified in the 1820s with the emergence of republican revolutions in Europe and Latin America. In his communications with these post-revolutionary states, Bentham adopted the stance of both the “expert” and the “reformer” as he outlined his proposals for effective and progressive legislation. Evidently, Bentham felt Boyer’s Haiti was an ideal place to see his vision of more effective and sustainable modes of law and governance to be

191 *Poetical Epistle*, 33-37.
implemented. In a letter that accompanied the Proposal, Bentham told Boyer of his respect for the Haitian president's character and praised him for resisting a monarchical title on his adoption of power.\textsuperscript{195} He also commended Boyer on the unification with Santo Domingo—something he praised as a "glorious success". Although Bentham admitted that he knew little about Haiti’s constitution under Boyer, he offered his services to frame a "body of laws" for the republic—the characteristics of which he claimed: “none of which hath as yet been exemplified in the laws of any country”. Bentham told Boyer of his intention to send the Proposal to other post-revolutionary countries and while he admitted that not all of them would heed his advice, he told the Haitian president of his hope that in general there would be a global acceptance of the main ideas outlined.\textsuperscript{196}

Although Boyer did not accept Bentham’s offer to act as a legislator of the new Haitian republic, Bentham’s letter—along with the Poetical Epistle and Carlile’s writing—is indicative of the value that Haiti held in discussions of what constituted legitimate, progressive and effective governance. Carlile and Bentham particularly seemed to suggest a very real desire to see Boyer’s Haitian republic prosper—if nothing else than as evidence that reform and a new approach to governance could bring benefits to both the state and its citizens. This desire and enthusiasm for the progress that Haiti represented was reflected in reports of toasts being drunk to Boyer and “the Republicans of the Island of St. Domingo” in taverns in various cities throughout Britain in the early 1820s—a toast Carlile instructed his followers to make at celebrations of the birth of Thomas Paine.\textsuperscript{197} Along with Boyer, Carlile insisted that the names of Washington, Jefferson, Bolivar, Thomas Cochrane and, of course, Paine himself all be toasted as well—situating the new Haitian president in illustrious republican company indeed.\textsuperscript{198} Letters sent to The Republican some weeks after suggest that Carlile’s instructions were adhered to with enthusiasm and that

\textsuperscript{195} Bentham’s letter was dated 29 December 1822. For a full copy of the letter see Catherine Fuller, ed. The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Vol. 11: January 1822 to June 1824, The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham (2000), 176-179.

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 177.

\textsuperscript{197} McCalman, Radical Underworld, 196-197.

\textsuperscript{198} The Republican, 25 January 1822, 99.
such toasts were replicated the year after, again at celebrations of Paine’s birth. Rémy Duthille has highlighted how toasting became a “political and contentious act” that emphasised “the drinker’s allegiance to a patron and, later, to a cause”. James Epstein has further demonstrated how radicals in the early nineteenth century used toasts to align themselves ideologically with groups and movements across time. In toasting the revolutionary republicans of Haiti, British radicals also briefly crossed both geographical and racial boundaries to further express their hopes of a more global republican revolution.

The image of British radical figures joyously toasting the Haitian president in their celebrations of the revered Thomas Paine is an intriguing one and one that exemplifies the hold that the Haitian republic had over some British imaginations in the early 1820s. It would be an overstatement to suggest that the general press was as enthusiastic in their writing of the new Haitian republic and its new president, but at the same time it is important to note that newspapers and periodicals in Britain largely showed support for both. As in America, such reports attested to the fact that under Boyer the Haitians were in the “utmost tranquillity” and that Haiti continued to progress towards social and economic stability. British newspapers noted that under Boyer the Haitians “had acquired a degree of consistency and strength, which Hayti had not enjoyed since the expulsion of the whites”. The idea that Haiti was advancing in ways it had not under Dessalines or Christophe was taken further by newspapers such as the Yorkshire Gazette which claimed that with Boyer’s leadership the new republic had assumed “a station which entitles it to the notice of civilised communities”

199 The Republican, 22 February 1822, 234; The Republican, 7 February 1823, 179.
202 Morning Chronicle, 20 August 1822.
203 Observer, 13 May 1822.
and that, with its new system of government, Haiti would be better placed to
“foster and improve” its communication with other countries—“in itself a grand
source of civilisation”. Some reports used Boyer’s proclamations as further
proof of Haiti’s civility under the new leader and even claimed that such
documents were a testament to what a “free and independent people” could
achieve.

These reports generally spoke approvingly of Boyer’s annexation of Santo
Domingo and the unification of the whole of Hispaniola. Rather than evoke fear
about the potential expansion of a ‘black empire’, British newspapers tended to
report on the annexation in an understanding light as they attested to its
necessity for Haiti to secure themselves against Spanish or French designs to
reconquer the whole island. Some even went so far as to claim that the
implementation of Boyer’s government not only pleased the blacks of Santo
Domingo but also that “the Spaniards there discover no disposition to return
under the yoke” of the Spanish king and that they “deemed it more conducive to
coalesce with their Haytian neighbours”. Boyer’s unifying effect—of both sides
of the island and between blacks and mulattoes in particular—led some reports
to conclude that “nothing could be a stronger proof of his wisdom”. Letters
published in periodicals such as the Monthly Magazine (which were printed on
the front page) claimed to “rejoice exceedingly” at this unification and they
emphasised the idea that the annexation was achieved without any “war or
bloodshed”—something that apparently contributed “greatly” to the “wisdom
and humanity” of Boyer. Such reports wrote approvingly that Boyer’s
government “prevents all distinction of persons’ and that “[l]iberty and equality
reign throughout their republic”. In these reports observers in Britain looked
to legitimise Boyer’s early-Haiti as a form of liberal and progressive governance
that apparently nurtured both economic and social improvements—and, in turn,

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204 Yorkshire Gazette, 13 October 1821.
205 The Monthly Magazine, or British Register, vol. 54 (1822), 370.
206 Yorkshire Gazette, 13 October 1821; Observer, 13 May 1822.
207 The Monthly Magazine, 1 July 1822, 482-483.
208 The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany, January-June 1823, vol. 12
(1823), 732.
such reports asserted Boyer’s leadership as a model of inspiration at a time of increasing criticisms of the Old World regimes throughout the Atlantic world.

In this way, Haiti’s republican revolution became one that British radicals and American republicans could relate to on a more tangible level than the revolution which had freed the island from slavery sixteen years previously. In their discussions of the latest reformed version of the Haitian state, American observers called to mind their own rejection of monarchical rule while British radical observers looked on admiringly at the new start afforded to the black republic—one which promised to benefit its citizens at every level. In both American and British discourses, the question of how Haiti’s republicanism could be legitimised was a recurrent theme and one that allows an insight into American and British notions of virtuous and progressive forms of governance in the 1820s.

The demise of the Haitian monarchy resulted in a new wave of support for Haiti and the early years of Boyer’s unified republic clearly captured the imaginations of a number of observers on both sides of the Atlantic. Haiti’s shift to republicanism after Christophe’s death—and the apparent benefits it brought to its citizens—was a shot in the arm for American republicans still reeling from the domestic political crises of the late 1810s. Boyer’s Haiti briefly allowed patriotic Americans to both extol the virtues of republicanism and to further cement the ideological divide between the progressive New World and the stagnant Old World. Although the Haitian republic was nowhere near as revered as the new republics of Spanish America, Haiti’s new form of governance nonetheless allowed American supporters to seize on a period of republican fever to assert the legitimacy of the Haitian state—something that pro-trade advocates made particular use of as they combined economic and ideological arguments in their calls for more favourable commercial agreements.

Haiti’s new form of governance similarly captured the attention of British radical observers who celebrated the revolution against the Haitian monarchy as evidence of the universal desire to be unshackled from the chains of
governmental and monarchical oppression. As some British radical thinkers increasingly leaned towards republican modes of thought, the early progress of Boyer's Haiti provided an opportunity to assert the virtuous nature of political reform and republicanism. Although it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which these observers genuinely wanted the Haitian state to thrive on the Atlantic stage, these depictions nonetheless are evidence that in the continuing face of non-recognition from the powers of the West, the Haitian state not only elicited support from a number of British and American actors but it also provided an anti-conservative model of inspiration for the need to implement and sustain liberal and progressive modes of governing. The emergence of reports of Boyer's own brand of despotic leadership would eventually dampen this enthusiasm. However, the early promise that some observers felt that Haiti held in the early 1820s demonstrates the multiple ways in which Haiti's revolutionary citizens continued to inspire thinkers throughout the Atlantic world and is further testament to Haiti's revolutionary legacy.
Conclusion

In 1825, Jean-Pierre Boyer agreed to pay the King of France—the recently-crowned Charles X—150 million francs in reparations to secure official recognition of the Haitian state from France. By compensating France for its perceived losses since the Revolution, Boyer thought he was providing the potential stability needed for Haiti’s economic future. Yet, as it turned out, this indemnity would eventually cripple the Haitian state for years to come. At the time, however, news of France’s recognition of the Haitian state was largely greeted positively in Britain. This is most likely because a number of British observers agitated for their government to follow France’s lead in recognising the Haitian state in the hope of re-establishing favourable trade relations with Boyer and Haiti. Until the early 1820s, British merchants in Haiti had largely enjoyed favourable trade duties.¹ But, by 1823, this preferential treatment had been abolished, allegedly as a result of Britain’s willingness to recognise the independence of the new states of Spanish America but not Haiti.² British newspapers, therefore, published accounts of the “rejoicings” of the Haitians as a result of France’s recognition.³ Others more directly asserted that the official recognition of Haiti from France “raised the Haytian in the rank of sovereign nations”.⁴ Such reports concluded that this agreement served to confirm Haiti’s “wise and energetic Government” and that it would be possible to “foresee what a high degree of power they may attain” as a result of their agreement with their ex-colonial power.⁵ By 1826, poems appeared in publications such as the Dublin and London Magazine in honour of Haiti’s republican heroes. For instance, 'To the Men of Hayti, on the Establishment of Their Independence' highlighted the nation’s perceived toil in “the struggles of Liberty’s cause”. The poem depicted external recognition as the final act in Haiti’s struggle for freedom that had started with the Revolution thirty-five years previous, and it claimed that

¹ Gaffield, Haitian Connections, 188-189.
³ Liverpool Mercury, 2 September 1825.
⁴ Observer, 9 September 1825.
⁵ Observer, 19 September 1825.
Haitians should “cherish” their achievements. For observers such as this anonymous poet, in an age of successful revolutions and newly formed political entities, Haiti had endured a particularly rocky but glorious road to independence.

A number of newspapers in America reacted to news of France’s recognition of Haiti with similar enthusiasm. When news broke of the French-Haitian agreement by July 1825, American audiences were besieged by a flurry of reports that commented on this perceived legitimisation of Haiti’s sovereign status. Similar to British reports, a number of these depictions praised Charles X for admitting Haiti’s “just rank” among nations while simultaneously emphasising the commercial potential of Haiti for Americans. Such reports tended to emphasise the perceived sagacity of Charles X’s decision, particularly for the potentially favourable trade relations which American newspapers predicted would remain lucrative for the French for decades to come. As a result, numerous publications called on the American government to follow suit and to recognise Haiti’s sovereignty or risk allowing France to monopolise commercial relations with the Haitian state.

In 1826 the British government—along with several other European states—“implicitly acknowledged” Haiti’s independence by sending diplomats and consuls to the island. However, the British government would refuse to commit to any formal treaties or agreements with the Haitian state until 1839, thereby meaning that explicit and official recognition from Britain continued to remain elusive for the majority of Boyer’s time in charge. And despite support from pockets of the American press, hopes for the official recognition of Haiti from the American government had already been diminishing significantly by 1825. Perhaps the most damaging blow had been the Monroe Doctrine in 1823—

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6 *The Dublin and London Magazine*, vol. 11 (1826), 47.
7 *Christian Watchman*, 19 August 1825.
8 *National Journal*, 2 August 1825; *Western Luminary*, 14 September 1825.
10 Ibid.
legislation that in effect recognised the newly-independent states of Spanish America but excluded Haiti from the legitimisation of these new political sovereignties. French recognition still gave hope to some American supporters, and from 1825 until the mid-1800s numerous petitions and memorials were presented to the American government to recognise officially the legitimacy of Haiti’s sovereignty. However, these pro-merchant and abolitionist calls would go largely unheeded and America’s official stance of the non-recognition of the Haitian state would not change until 1862.

In the absence of any official recognition from America or Britain in the first twenty years of its independence, the Haitian state nevertheless provoked a wide array of responses from transatlantic observers which, consciously or not, in turn lent support to calls for the acceptance or denial of Haitian sovereignty. And it was within these depictions that Haiti instigated more internal reflections on both sides of the Atlantic regarding the legitimacy, or otherwise, of the modes of government in America and Britain. In the early nineteenth century, American publications debated the best way forward for the still-young American republic and the legitimacy of its form of government, particularly in the context of an Atlantic world largely dominated by dynastic forms of rule. From the early 1800s, the prominence of Democratic-Republican ideology meant an increasing disdain for the political practices of the Old World—a disdain which largely hinged on dynastic claims to legitimacy. In this climate, the legitimacy of America’s supposedly liberal and progressive form of republicanism was often asserted in contrast to the ‘archaic’ claims of Old World monarchies.

Within these political discourses, Haiti’s governments and leaders were at times legitimised as they were seen to reflect the virtues of republican governance and of America’s position as a leading light in a paradigm shift in Atlantic world approaches to governance. Even within this positive context Haiti’s republican status was nevertheless often viewed as a poor imitation of America’s

\[11\] For an overview of American attempts to lobby the American government into recognising the Haitian state see Dubois, Haiti, 137-154.
government and, therefore, the Haitian government was depicted as being unable to fully promote the ideals of republicanism. However, when Haiti’s leaders looked for inspiration from dynastic forms of political rule this was viewed as an attempt to instil the ‘illegitimate’ modes of Old World governance that were so derided in America. In particular, Dessalines’s emperorship and Christophe’s monarchy were both denounced as being symptomatic of the corrupt and self-serving nature of imperial governments—depictions that in turn hindered the potential for support for Haitian independence. Despite the very vocal pockets of support from some American commentators, Haiti’s leaders struggled to implement a form of governance that could both secure Haitian prosperity and also elicit acceptance and recognition from an insecure early American republic.

Meanwhile, British depictions of the early Haitian state were similarly subject to affirmations or contentions of the legitimacy of Britain’s own form of governance. From the end of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution had occupied a unique and threatening place in British political discourse as observers witnessed the upheaval of the French monarchy. Although loyalist denunciations of France largely dominated British political rhetoric in the early nineteenth century, the post-revolutionary status and successes of both France and America continued to represent an ideological and a tangible threat to Britain’s ruling classes. Until the mid-1810s, Britain’s war with Napoleonic France framed assertions of the superior nature of its constitutional monarchy and of the illegitimacy of post-revolutionary leaders, as epitomised by Napoleon. After Napoleon’s capture in 1815, more radical voices emerged to contest the grounds on which loyalists affirmed the legitimacy and effectiveness of British political leadership.

Although Britain had remained largely isolated from the radical political changes that had been sweeping through the Atlantic world from the end of the eighteenth century, commentators ensured that Britain’s dynastic form of governance was constantly re-considered in the context of this revolutionary age. In this climate, the presence of Haiti’s numerous post-Revolution
governments took on a multitude of meanings for British observers in the context of new claims to political legitimacy. When Haiti's leaders looked to emulate Old World forms of government, this at times elicited positive reactions as British loyalists viewed this as affirmation of the desire among new nations to emulate Britain's 'superior' form of traditional rule. However, for other observers Haiti's allusions to dynastic governance were sneered at and Haiti's self-created sovereigns were excluded as illegitimate imitators. In the moments when Haiti's leaders shunned these traditional modes of political leadership, British radicals and liberals were inspired to embrace the Haitian state and to champion its perceived programme of social equality, inclusion and reform. British loyalists, on the other hand, derided Haiti's more republican forms of leadership as volatile, unstable and evidence of the weak foundations upon which non-dynastic forms of governance were built. Although British supporters did offer, at times, noticeable and substantial encouragement to the fledgling Haitian state, Haiti’s different leaders found distinct challenges to eliciting support from British audiences, no matter the mode of governance they adopted.

In this way, the contentious nature of political legitimacy in the early nineteenth century had a profound impact on transatlantic reactions to the early Haitian state. This, in turn, lends a greater understanding to the categories within which America and Britain framed depictions of the Haitian state and its independence. In particular, these portrayals of Haiti and its leaders afford a greater appreciation of the ways in which American observers viewed the ever-changing political landscape of the Atlantic world and the discourses that both conservative and more radical republicans alike constructed to fiercely debate the foundations upon which political legitimacy had hitherto been asserted. And the ways in which Haiti was at times included and at others time excluded from discourses that debated post-revolutionary forms of governance tells us as much about how American observers viewed their own infant republic as they did Haiti’s. As Ashli White notes at the beginning of her study of American perceptions of the Haitian Revolution: “Contrary to engrained ideas about exceptionalism, it is only by looking outside the nation’s borders and appraising its engagement with the wider world that we come to understand the making of
the early American republic”. Similarly, by studying the ways in which Americans engaged with and reacted to the presence of an independent Haitian state, one is afforded a better understanding of how American observers viewed their own nation and the ways in which they defended or criticised the political leadership of early America. The reflections of Haiti that emerged in the aftermath of Haiti’s declared independence often projected anxieties regarding the vulnerability of America’s position in the Atlantic world, despite its increasingly vocal affirmations of the superiority of its government over the other political powers of the West. At other times, however, depictions of the Haitian state were seen to support confident assertions of the virtuous nature of American republicanism. In either case, Americans clearly looked to Haiti as a significant frame of reference as they sought to clarify their position in the ever-changing political landscape of the Atlantic world.

Similarly, British reflections on the Haitian state and its independence are a valuable insight into the multiple lenses through which British conservatives, reformers and liberals all viewed their own system of political leadership. Atlantic world approaches to governance and traditional claims to political legitimacy—as exemplified by Britain’s constitutional monarchy—had already been upended by the revolutions of America and France at the end of the eighteenth century. A black post-revolutionary state was always going to find it difficult to elicit the same kind of support that the revolutions in America and France had secured among some British observers. However, the positivity with which a number of British commentators responded to Haiti’s various political leaders demonstrated a willingness among radicals and loyalists alike to embrace this new form of post-revolutionary governance—regardless of the race of its leaders. And even when the Haitian state was the subject of derision in British publications, these discourses were often reflective of an anxiety of the challenges that post-revolutionary governance in general posed to Britain’s traditional claims to legitimate governance. Marilyn Morris has argued that the French Revolution “helped lay the foundations for the modern British

12 White, Encountering Revolution, 9.
monarchy’s character and ideology of justification” and the emergence of the Haitian state—albeit to a lesser extent—effected the ways in which loyalists and radicals looked to affirm or question the basis of Britain’s mode of governing. In the same way that American commentators of various political leanings looked to foreign political powers for encouragement that their new form of political leadership could thrive in an Atlantic world dominated by Old World dynasties, so too did British observers turn to the seats of foreign governments to make sense of these new political entities and to judge the stability, or otherwise, of the British government and monarchy. If, as David Geggus argues, Haiti in the nineteenth century became a “crucial test case for ideas about race and about the future of colonial slavery”, then it also became an integral point of reference for ideas about governance and legitimacy in an age of revolutionary upheaval throughout the Atlantic world.

On both sides of the Atlantic, Haiti represented a unique and often times a paradoxical new political entity—one that at times strengthened and at others called into question American and British claims to the superiority of their government. In this age of revolutions, the independent Haitian state was often a key factor in discussions of post-revolutionary entities in Europe and the Americas. The varying nature of these reactions calls into question the notion that Atlantic observers were united in disdain for the Haitian state in the early nineteenth century. These depictions also led to a greater understanding that reactions to Haiti were not always driven by perceptions and ideologies of race. To return to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s observation that early-nineteenth-century observers of the Haitian Revolution were hindered by their “ready-made categories” as they tried to make sense of a successful slave revolt, this was also true of observers witnessing the emergence of the independent Haitian state. American and British commentaries of Haiti’s various early governments desperately searched for suitable frames of references within which to make sense of an independent Haiti. Where, for example, the Latin American

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15 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 73.
revolutions clearly supported American republican ideologies, or the revolutions of Europe of 1820 inspired British radicals, the role of the Haitian state in such discourses was much more ambiguous. Nevertheless, within a significant proportion of these discourses it is clear that a number of commentators attempted to appropriate meaning and value to the presence of the new nation—albeit in a manner that would best serve their own political agendas. Although never completely ignored, for a number of commentators the race of Haiti’s early leaders was less important than the modes of governance and political leadership that they represented. In this revolutionary age, the legitimacy of Haiti’s early leaders was a fluid, ever-changing entity—one that was shaped and re-shaped by conservatives and radicals alike, depending on the political agenda being furthered at that particular moment in time.

Understanding the multitude of ways in which the Haitian state was reflected upon affords a greater appreciation for the various lenses through which American and British observers viewed the foundations of political legitimacy in the nineteenth century. But these depictions also underline the significance of the Haitian state for the Atlantic world as a whole in this period of time. Undoubtedly, Haiti continued to evoke for Western observers throughout the nineteenth century memories of its Revolution and it remained the most significant emblem of anti-slavery defiance. But the ‘unthinkability’ of the Haitian state also became framed within the context of its presence on the political stage of the Atlantic world. As Haiti’s early leaders tried to assert the country’s independence in the eyes of the Western powers, these attempts prompted observers on both sides of the Atlantic to reconsider the foundations upon which the very notion of political legitimacy was asserted. In the first decades of its independence, therefore, Haiti’s leaders continued to provoke inward reflections of these Atlantic powers—underlining the profound impact that Haitian independence continued to have for the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century.

After decades of being ‘silenced’, the Haitian Revolution now rightly occupies a significant position in studies and histories of transatlantic slavery and the age of
revolutions. The only successful slave revolution in history was a cataclysmic event for the entire Atlantic world and one that threatened to turn the Western hemisphere on its head. But what we are only now beginning to appreciate is how, after 1804, Haiti continued to demand attention from the powers of the West. Haiti’s status as a post-slavery state was at times eclipsed by its position as an emblem of post-revolutionary rule and post-colonial defiance. Jean Claude Martineau has noted that present-day Haiti occupies the unique position of being the only country in the world with a permanent suffix—“Haiti, poorest country in the Western hemisphere”. However, the debates and discussions that Haitian independence provoked in the early nineteenth century demonstrate that—in the early years of its independence at least—this unwanted title was far removed from the newly independent state. Although Haiti is now often relegated to a footnote in political discourses of the Atlantic world and stigmatised as a site of poverty and political corruption, the early Haitian state and its leaders were a key signifier in discussions that debated the theoretical foundations of governmental authority and the best way forward for political leaders in the turbulent world of the nineteenth century. In this way, Haiti had a rich and distinctive legacy for observers throughout the wider Atlantic world—a legacy that demands to be uncovered and underlined much further.

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