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Maroon Movements Against Empire The Long Haitian Revolution, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries

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Abstract

Marronnage, or escape from slavery, was a longue-durée form of resistance to slavery in Haiti and was also, as Sylvia Wynter argues, a “dialectical response to the capitalist plantation system”—a system that aimed to deny humanity, sever social and cultural ties, and commodified people and their labor power. This article, as well as works by others such as Cedric Robinson (1983), Sylvia Wynter (n.d.), and Jean Casimir (2020), argues that marronnage was a fundamentally anti-capitalist mode of resistance, socio-political critique, and grassroots mobilizing. In the immediate moments when enslaved people fled plantations, they reclaimed possession of themselves and other tangible and intangible resources, such as their time, social relationships, forms of knowledge, and labor skills that enslavers stole from them. When maroons re-appropriated resources and mobilized themselves, they challenged and subverted colonial plantation structures, contributing to the downfall of both Spanish and French imperial slaveries in Haiti. During and after the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, Africa-born rebels and maroons were central to the mobilizing structures that successfully fought to abolish slavery and overturn colonialism—representing an astounding rupture to the prevailing Atlantic world-system that was dependent upon enslaved labor. Even after the post-independence Haitian government replicated aspects of the colonial administration, as Casimir (2020) points out, the formerly enslaved masses of Haiti organized themselves into communal social arrangements that prioritized subsistence labor and extended kin networks, and continued to rely on marronnage to protest exploitative economic practices. This article explores the trajectory of marronnage in Haiti as a continuous struggle, emphasizing the ways that it exposed the violence, exploitation, and oppression inherently embedded in the Atlantic world-system, and exposed the limits of the governing Haitian states.

Keywords: Marroonage, Slavery, Haitian Revolution



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The modern era and its resulting social institutions are often characterized by the historical intersections of the rising capitalist world-system, democratic governance, and scientific discovery in Western Europe and North America. However, this conception fails to recognize that these processes were predicated upon practices of enslavement and labor exploitation, colonial conquest and empire building, and racialization of non-European peoples across the globe. Groups and individuals who have been rendered vulnerable, expendable, and marginal to the project of modernity have consistently exposed the inherent contradictions that lay at the foundation of the systems of interactions, cultures, and institutions that emerged during the modern era. Indigenous peoples, Africans, and African descendants in the Americas were, and in many ways remain, at the forefront of contesting the social, economic, and political formations that dispossess them of personhood and other tangible and intangible resources: their land and other natural resources; the value of their labor, knowledge, skills, and time; and their kinship ties, social networks, and cultural heritages. Throughout the Americas, Europeans disregarded local indigenous populations as legitimate inhabitants of the geographic spaces they sought to claim—in many cases committing acts of genocide and forced displacement of indigenous peoples. Europeans then re-populated those colonized spaces with enslaved Africans, whom they violently forced to labor on plantations and to contribute to the capitalist system (Andrews 2021).

Over the course of the four-centuries-long triangular slave trade, African people were the foremost form of capital in the Atlantic world-system. Europeans procured other commodities from Africa in exchange for commodities such as guns, salt, rum, and cloths; but primarily “allocated to Africa the role of supplier of human captives to be used as slaves in various parts of the world” (Rodney 1973: 88–89). Bureaucratic rationality governed each stage of the slave trade and colonial expansion to the Americas. European slave traders, financiers, brokers, doctors, ship captains, sailors, plantation owners, and a myriad of other actors exercised the mechanisms of scientific thought to measure how to reduce captive Africans to quantifiable commodities, and to forecast and extract maximum profits from the bodies of Black people, including their labor and biological reproduction, and from the land (Hartman 2007; Johnson 2020; Morgan 2021). Doctors denied slave trade victims adequate health care, only keeping them alive long enough to pass inspections and be deemed purchasable. Enslavers deprived captives of food and packed them tightly into slave dungeons and ships to spend as little money as possible to maximize profits (Smallwood 2008; Mustakeem 2016). On colonial plantations, enslavers used bondspeople as private property and collateral to leverage insurance payouts, to secure loans, to finance and expand their plantations, and to industrialize their respective nations (Williams [1944] 1994; Rodney 1973; Baptist 2014; Berry 2017; Bride 2020; Andrews 2021) by violently extracting labor value, as well as bondspeople’s other forms of human capital such as their time, knowledge, and skills to cultivate sugar, coffee, cotton, rice, tobacco, indigo, and other crops. Slave status generally followed the status of the mother; and the field of gynecology was born from experimentations on Black women’s bodies as the techniques that doctors aimed to perfect were geared toward ensuring enslaved Black women could continue to reproduce more enslaved people even after difficult deliveries (Owens 2017).

The slaving dungeons that remain interspersed along the coastlines of West and West Central Africa, slave ships, “New World” plantations, and other labor camps were sites of colonial violence and enslaving practices; in turn they were also the sites where Africans exerted their individual and collective agency, producing waves of resistance, rebellion, and revolution that represented their alternative modes of humanity, collective consciousness, and sovereign political organization. In this paper, I examine marronnage, or escapes from slavery, as one of the earliest forms of collective action against the late fifteenth to nineteenth century apparatuses of colonial violence and racial slavery. Marronnage was a common form of resistance that enslaved Africans and some indigenous people undertook as they sought to reclaim themselves from the trauma of being violently commodified and exiled through the slave trade, and being forced to labor on “New World” plantations as racialized chattel slaves. The nature of marronnage varied, often depending on geographic context. In places like Jamaica, Cuba, Brazil, or Surinam, maroon communities (also called *palenques*, *quilombos*, or *maniels*) developed in mountainous or otherwise isolated, inaccessible regions, forming large-scale, armed settlements that, in some cases, were organized as African-styled kingdoms with militarized hierarchies to defend against colonial authorities. Colonists often characterized these maroons as *grand*, or “big” maroons who escaped and lived in large groups, and had the capacity to engage in major revolts and conflicts with authorities. Maroons in Jamaica and Haiti even formalized treaties with respective colonial authorities that recognized their freedom and sovereignty. *Petit* or “small” maroons were considered enslaved people who temporarily escaped plantations and at times voluntarily returned, a tactic that enslavers linked to the runaway’s personal dissatisfaction with living conditions, lack of access to food, frustrations or fears of the threat of physical violence, or other work-related disputes. However, marronnage extended beyond individual grievances about the conditions of slavery, it was a collective repudiation of the system itself. Further, *petit* maroons often helped cultivate connections between enslaved people on plantations and those residing in self-liberated settlements, and helped to broaden the tapestry of Black resistance by delivering messages and providing food, clothing, resources, and protection to maroon rebels (Fick 1990).

Despite the ongoing, though clandestine, interactions between enslaved people and maroons, and the continual acts of marronnage, enslavers generally dismissed marronnage and other forms of resistance by categorizing them as actions of an animal. Europeans’ ontological belief that Africans were non-human justified the slave trade and colonization of the Americas, and informed the ways that colonists perceived and defined acts of resistance. The Spanish etymology of marronnage comes from the word *cimarron*, which means “wild beast,” suggesting Spanish and other European enslavers accepted Africans’ position as captive slaves as a fact of nature and did not consider Africans’ desires to be free as a legitimate possibility. However, the term *cimarron* may in fact derive from the indigenous Taino term *simaran*, which refers to an arrow in flight whose trajectory might be interpreted as “the intentionality of...enslaved or colonized people

extricating themselves from conditions of oppression”¹ (Rocha 2018: 19). I draw on this latter perspective with focus specifically on the nation of Haiti, which was the site of a series of “firsts” in modern history: the first site of European colonization of the Americas, the first site enslaved Africans’ arrival to the Americas, the first site of Black and indigenous revolt, the first revolution of enslaved people that abolished slavery and overturned colonial rule, and the first free and independent Black nation in the Americas. Haitian scholars have long argued that marronnage was the core tradition of resistance that anticipated and shaped the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, and that continues to impact Haitian collective consciousness and action. As historian Jean Fouchard stated, “marooning is the dominant feature of all Haitian history...it is undoubtedly the phenomenon which gave its orientation to the history of our nation” (Taleb-Khyar 1992: 322).

Fifteenth through eighteenth century maroon communities, leading into the post-independence Haitian *lakou* system of family landownership and subsistence farming, might also exemplify exilic spaces, which Marxist and anarchist theorizing defines as “areas of social and economic life where people and groups attempt to escape from capitalist economic processes, whether by territorial escape or by the attempt to build structures that are autonomous of capitalist processes of accumulation and social control” (Grubačić and O’Hearn 2016: 1). These exilic spaces operate outside the logic of both state regulation and the capitalist world-economy, where they instead emphasize cooperation and self-rule rather than the accumulation of capital as the mode of activity. Theorists suggest that capitalism inadvertently creates spaces of those “left aside by encroaching process whereby core powers incorporate external arenas into the capitalist world-economy” (O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016: 159). Such exclusion from states’ central functioning helped to facilitate the triangular Atlantic slave trade. The rise of Atlantic slavery coincided with and exacerbated existing tensions and conflicts between precolonial West and West Central African states; this left individuals and communities that were peripheral to important lineage clans, royal politics, and elite merchant classes vulnerable to kidnapping, warfare, and raids that converted African people into captives available for European traders to purchase and later sell at American ports. Africans who lived in regions that were overrun by the slave trade attempted to protect themselves and their communities using a range of tactics, including fleeing colonial slaveholders and evading kidnappers to form maroon settlements such as the lacustrine maroon village Ganvié at the Bight of Benin, as well as revolting at slave dungeons and on slave ships (Diouf 2003). As a consequence of being forcefully expelled as captives from the African side of the Atlantic system and thrust into the American side, those who engaged in collective resistance on the African continent exhibited exilic “responses to encroachment, as forms of defense by populations which...refuse to be incorporated” (O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016: 159) into capitalist accumulation processes that wholly depended on the commodification, racialization, and exploitation of Black people and their labor power.

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Earlier scholarship on marronnage comes from historical and anthropological research on communities of runaways and their descendants in places like Brazil, Cuba, Surinam, or Jamaica (Heuman 1986; Price 1996; Thompson 2006; Moomou 2015). The fields of Black/African Diaspora Studies and Atlantic history continue to explicate the myriad of ways enslaved people and self-liberated people of African descent advanced their own definitions of freedom in the form of marronnage. Enlightenment ideals of citizenship, freedom, property, liberty, and brotherhood fell short of universalization and application to the enslaved populations whose labor power contributed to financing European capitalist development and colonial anti-monarchal revolutions. Communities of runaways, maroon wars, and slave uprisings like the Haitian Revolution sought to extend freedom and rights to the enslaved and upended colonial capitalist formations, radically altering the course of the modern era (see Brown 2020; Kars 2020; Holden 2021). Therefore, Black/African Diaspora Studies frame marronnage as not just a historical phenomenon, but also an organizing structure, a socio-political critique, and an anti-colonial, anti-slavery political project that holds political possibilities of revolution (Roberts 2015). Drawing on insights from Black/African Diaspora Studies and Atlantic world histories of the Haitian Revolution, this paper similarly focuses on the case of Haiti and frames marronnage as a fundamentally anti-capitalist mode of critique, resistance, and organizing.

Cedric Robinson (1983) referred to this broader resistance struggle as the Black Radical Tradition, acts of work sabotage and stoppage, rebellions, marronnage, and revolutions that were grounded in their African-based ontologies and opposed the capitalist underpinnings of the slave trade and enslavement in the Americas. When viewed from a *longue durée*, “from below” perspective, the temporal interrelationship between the initiation and deepening of colonial plantation slavery and enslaved people’s contestations can be thought of as a series of revolutions and counterrevolutions. The making and unmaking of slavery were most immediately located on the bodies of those who self-liberated from plantations. Enslaved people, maroons, and other rebels took advantage of events during the age of the Haitian Revolution and carved out spaces of freedom for themselves, embodying progressive political ideals through their acts of resistance and creations of new lifeways (Scott [1985] 2018). The aggregate scope of marronnage in Haiti was tantamount to a long-term anti-slavery, anti-colonial struggle that contributed to two colonial-era Black-led revolutions: the sixteenth-century revolt against Spanish rule, or what I call the first *Ayitian* Revolution, and the nineteenth-century Haitian Revolution against the French. Histories of marronnage continue to inform the Black Radical Tradition, and in Haiti, marronnage shapes what Jean Casimir (2020) calls the Haitian people’s counter-plantation system and popular sovereignty—a mode of collective living, resistance, and critique grounded in the Haitian Vodou religious tradition, the Kreyol language, and the *lakou* system of interdependent labor and family relations. Similarly, Sylvia Wynter argues in *Black Metamorphosis* (n.d.) that enslaved people’s cultural traditions such as sacred rituals and burial rites, their acts of resistance like marronnage, and other uprisings exemplified their re-humanization of themselves, reclaiming ownership of themselves, their kinship ties, their social and religious heritages, and their connection to the land. Throughout the Americas, people of African descent produced new cultures, religions, and ways

of life based on their African sensibilities and their newfound circumstances in colonial plantation societies. This paper also considers socio-cultural and religious formations—specifically Haitian Vodou—to be part of the repertoire of resistance that helped to set the stage for anti-systemic revolts while contributing to the dismantling of colonial capitalist projects, and therefore exemplified the ways enslaved people of African descent in Haiti defined humanity and freedom on their own terms and created alternative modes of modernity. Exploring the trajectory of marronnage in Haiti reveals the violence, exploitation, and oppression inherently embedded in the colonial system, and in the independence era, exposes the limits of the governing Haitian states.

Historiography of Racial Colonial Capitalism and Black Resistance

The significance of coloniality, racial slavery, capitalism, and Black resistance actions like the Haitian Revolution in establishing the social, economic, and political foundation of the modern world-system has emerged from generations of silencing (Trouillot 1995). The revolution is now a commonly accepted subject of study in Black/African Diaspora Studies and Atlantic history (Cooper [1925] 1988; James [1938] 1989; Genovese 1979; Robinson 1983; Scott [1986] 2018; Martin 2005; Santiago-Valles 2005; Klooster [2009] 2018; West, Martin, and Wilkins 2009), and is increasingly recognized within the discipline of sociology (Magubane 2005; Shilliam 2008; Bhambra 2011, 2015, 2016; Getachew 2016; Shilliam 2017; Hammer and White 2019). Nineteenth and early twentieth century Black scholars like W. E. B. Du Bois recognized the centrality of colonial questions and racial slavery to the modern world-system in his doctoral dissertation *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* ([1896] 2007), and in other works that cited racial discrimination as the main cause for African Americans' material conditions ([1899] 1995, [1903] 1994, [1935] 1992). According to Du Bois, these shared circumstances were the basis of Black people's racial consciousness and strivings for freedom in transforming their lived reality. He also described the ways in which the world-system responded to Black rebellions, such as the Haitian Revolution, by geographically expanding colonial capitalist formations to other parts of the world like Asia and Africa to take advantage of unexploited resources and labor pools. Later, Walter Rodney (1973) argued that the internationalization of trade intensified as Europeans utilized maritime technologies to monopolize the seas and create economic outposts in Africa and Asia, marking the beginnings of the world-economic system. Racialization was fundamental to the global organizing of classes, meaning the "color line" that Du Bois identified in *The Souls of Black Folk* not only demarcated the races according to the United States' Jim Crow laws, but it was a global formation that divided white European colonizing countries from those non-white countries and peoples they oppressed and exploited (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020).

Cedric Robinson (1983) also revisited Marxist analysis about the beginnings of capitalism, specifically that the slave trade, cotton production, and the commodification of Africans was a main tributary of industrial development. Additionally, his analysis of class formation among English workers found proto-racial bias against the Irish, meaning capitalism was racial and imperial even in Europe before colonization and slavery in the Americas. Howard Winant (2001) similarly argues that racialization processes were indigenous to Europe, beginning with the rise of

fifteenth-century Iberian Catholicism and the expulsion of Moors and Jews, which imbedded racialist thinking in western thought and the ideological and religious forces that drove European nationalism, imperial expansion, and slavery. Sylvia Wynter (2003) further asserts that these religious and ontological shifts deployed race to organize and classify who would or would not be considered human as pretext for racialized divisions of labor. Existing slave trading markets and sugar production around the Mediterranean Sea and Canary Islands set the stage for increasing demand for sugar consumption in Europe, making colonial territories in the Americas and Africans targets for violent conversion into plantation societies and enslaved laborers, respectively, and integration into the burgeoning world-system. Winant (1995) therefore argues that race “has been a constitutive element, an organizing principle, a *praxis* and structure that has constructed and reconstructed world society since the emergence of modernity, the enormous historical shift represented by the rise of Europe, the founding of the modern nation-states and empires, the *conquista*, the onset of African enslavement, and the subjugation of much of Asia” (Winant 1995: 19). Race cannot only be seen as an ideological product of capitalism, but a co-constitutive mode of structuring the world-system that persisted despite the Age of Revolutions ushering in notions of freedom, citizenship, brotherhood and equality.

Eighteenth century democratic revolutions overturned monarchical rulership and colonial formations, but they did not disrupt the world economic system built on enslaving people of African descent. In fact, some, such as Horne (2014), argue that the American War of Independence was in part colonists’ attempt to protect their slave holdings from growing anti-slavery sentiments in the metropole that could potentially lead to abolishing the slave trade. Indeed, despite the political rhetoric of equality, citizenship, and freedom that defined the Age of Revolutions, neither the American War of Independence nor the French Revolution directly resulted in the mass emancipation of enslaved people of African descent. Rather, it was Black uprisings, rebellions, revolts, and revolutions such as the Haitian Revolution that sought to free Black people, make them equal citizens, and remove race as a barrier to political participation. Black scholars like Anna Julia Cooper ([1925] 1988) and C. L. R. James ([1938] 1989) exposed the limitations of the French Revolution due to France’s unwavering commitment to enslaving, and placed the revolution in Haiti at the center of transformations that would push France toward emancipation, drain the French army of its resources, and force it to later abandon its colonial holdings in North America. Recent works have therefore argued that definitions of freedom, emancipation, and citizenship were grounded in slave-holding revolutions and the liberty to traffick in human flesh, making the lofty aims of the revolutions in North America and France woefully incomplete (Bhambra 2015, 2016). Few if any sociological studies of revolution have theorized about the Haitian Revolution or other cases in which analyses of race, slavery, and colonialism are prominent (Tilly 1978; Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991), which has led a “third wave” of historical sociologists to embrace study of new cases of revolution and other expressions of political agency using subaltern and transnational perspectives (Magubane 2005; Sohrabi 2005; Edwards 2017; Go and Lawson 2017; Hammer and White 2019). Rather, new definitions of revolution—particularly those with the Haitian Revolution centered—and perspectives on political

agency are needed to suit the realities of the formerly enslaved, formerly colonized world (Shilliam 2008; Bhambra 2011, 2015, 2016; Getachew 2016; Shilliam 2017; Hammer and White 2019).

Africans and African descendants in Caribbean colonies indeed assumed the mantle of redefining liberation and revolution, taking advantage of events in Europe and North America to advance their own revolutionary cause of abolishing slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy. Black rebellions such as the 1730s and 1790s Maroon Wars in Jamaica, the St. John's Rebellion, Tacky's Revolt in 1760 Jamaica, the Berbice uprising of 1763, and the Haitian Revolution disrupted the accumulation of capital by destroying plantations, forming maroon communities and rebel armies that waged costly wars with colonial troops, and inspiring further rebellion in other local contexts—making them anti-systemic in nature (Martin 2005; Santiago-Valles 2005; West and Martin 2009). France was forced to sell large portions of its North American territories to the United States to further finance its war against the revolutionaries in Haiti, signaling a significant loss to the French empire. While the Louisiana Purchase allowed the United States to expand its cotton production westward, the fear of free and enslaved Black people entering North America from the Caribbean in the wake of the Haitian Revolution prompted local laws that eventually contributed to the 1808 abolition of the international slave trade (Du Bois [1896] 2007). Word of the Haitian Revolution quickly spread among Black communities of the Americas, influencing unrest among enslaved people and maroons, unleashing cultures of resistance, and prompting other runaways and free people to attempt to migrate to Haiti in search of freedom and refuge from a world dominated by racial slavery (Johnson 2012; Ferrer 2012; Gonzalez 2015; Scott [1986] 2018). Further, in the years after the Haitian Revolution, Haiti directly assisted early nineteenth century South American struggles against Spanish colonialism in Mexico and Venezuela (West and Martin 2009), demonstrating “successive waves of black international struggles have countered, shaped, and at times destroyed central pillars of capital and empire, racial as well as political” (West et al. 2009: 2).

For most of the eighteenth century, colonial Haiti represented the depths of the violence that facilitated the slave trade and plantation slavery. Nearly half of the captives involuntarily brought to Haiti from the African continent died within three to five years from malnourishment, brutality, overwork, and various illnesses, prompting enslavers to constantly replace the bonded population with new captives. These extreme conditions of dehumanization, death, and brutality that enslavers inflicted upon bondspeople undergirded Haiti's unprecedented levels of sugar and coffee production that propelled France's wealth. As chattel property, when enslaved people escaped from plantations, even for short periods of time, they were in effect taking back ownership themselves as well as the social and human capital that was stolen from them. In Haiti, this reclamation of the commodified collective self at the micro-level helped to set the stage for the Haitian people's nineteenth-century reclamation of their freedom and independence from slavery, French colonialism, and the capitalist Atlantic world-system (Roberts 2015).

The Case of Haiti

Haiti's revolutionary trajectory begins with the first Africans brought to the Caribbean island of *Ayiti*, and demonstrates the importance of marronnage in dismantling colonial projects: the Spanish in the seventeenth century and the French in the following century. *Ayiti/Haiti*, or what the Spanish called *Españaola*, was the first site of Spanish colonial conquest and plantation slavery in the Americas. Enslaved Black people from Iberia and continent-born Africans brought to the island labored alongside the Taíno in Spanish mines and on sugar plantations, and collaborated with them in marronnage and rebellions. Through these common experiences and interactions, enslaved Black people likely would have adopted the indigenous people's liberation-orientated understanding of the term *cimarron*, producing a solidarity-based tradition of resistance. Haitian anthropologist Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique (2010) relied on oral histories and archaeological findings to argue that Haiti's legacy of resistance, language, and religion must be understood within the context of sixteenth and seventeenth century contact between Africans, Taínos, and European freebooters. Indeed, the Haitian revolutionaries referred to themselves as the "Indigenous Army" and, in 1804, readopted the island's original Taíno name *Ayiti*, further symbolically exemplifying the legacy of overlapping Black and Indigenous liberation struggles against empire. By studying marronnage in Haiti in its *longue-durée*, it becomes apparent that the Haitian Revolution of 1791 represented the failure of three European imperial powers, the Spanish, the French, and later the English, to fully subdue Black resistance. The tactic of marronnage emerged in the early colonial period and subsequently informed the organizational structures of the 1791 revolution. And given that the island was essentially a Black space from the mid-1500s forward, we can think of this historical trajectory not in terms of the maroons fighting back against empires, but as empires attempting to repress—and in some cases to co-opt—those who had already liberated themselves.

The first Black rebellion against enslavement in the Americas took place on Christmas Day of 1521, just outside of the Spanish colonial seat Santo Domingo when twenty enslaved Wolofs destroyed Diego Colón's sugar plantation and later joined forces with Taíno rebels led by the *cacique* Enriquillo (Woodruff 2013). In the following decades, potentially thousands of enslaved people fled Spanish plantations, mines, and farms forming transient communities beyond the reach of Spanish colonial settlements. Maroons migrated north to what later became part of the French territory: to Mole Saint Nicolas, Tortuga, the northern plain outside Cap Français (what is now Cap-Haïtien) and the Artibonite valley, and westward to the Grande'Anse peninsula, where they established their own trading circuits with other maroons, enslaved ranchers, and European freebooters; raised livestock; and organized subsistence farming (Rocha 2018). Black and Indigenous maroon leaders based in the Baoruco Mountains like Sébastien Lemba, Diego Guzman, Diego Ocampo, Miguel Biafra, Juan Criollo, and Juan Canario ventured across the island on horseback, raiding and destroying Spanish sugar plantations. In the 1540s, planters complained they could not go outside of city limits without arms as maroons had begun staking claim to the countryside as well as the Baoruco Mountains. By 1548, African maroons, who possibly numbered as many as 7,000 throughout the island in locations outside of Spanish control, had destroyed

approximately two-thirds of the island's over thirty sugar plantations (Guitar 2006; Schwaller 2018).

These African assaults on plantations dealt a serious blow to the Spanish sugar industry that, a century later, would be nearly abandoned. Spanish hegemony further declined as other European nations, especially the Dutch, French, and the English, embarked on colonial enterprise in the Americas. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the Spanish ceded the western parts of Ayiti/Españaola to the French in favor of exploits on the South American mainland, essentially making the island a backwater colony. Outside of the self-liberated population and Black people who were living in the island's interior and western regions, in 1606, there were 10,000 free and enslaved Black people, nearly 6,000 Spaniards, and even fewer Taíno counted at the city of Santo Domingo (Ponce-Vázquez 2016; Ricourt 2016). Compounded by a dwindling Taíno labor force and Spanish depopulation, local economic crises, and the pursuit of gold and sugar mining on the South American mainland, Spanish colonizers' first attempts to create a sugar-based economy in the colony of Ayiti/Españaola experienced a final death-knell by maroons, who by the early seventeenth century had spread out to each corner of the island's landscape.

In this first *Aytian* Revolution, Black resistance contributed to Spanish decisions to abandon western Ayiti/Españaola as a colonial site, leaving that portion of the island to be ruled by maroons and free people of color, European buccaneers, and a small number of remaining Spanish enslavers and enslaved laborers. These actors composed what Julius Scott ([1986] 2018) dubbed the "masterless class" until the French embarked on the second sugar revolution in the 1680s. By the time the French formally secured their claim to the western parts of the island with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, then calling it Saint Domingue, the island was already a predominately Black space with several loosely organized maroon communities in the areas that would become part of French Saint Domingue. In 1662, there were six hundred maroon families encamped in four large *palenques*—another word for runaway settlements—in the Baoruco Mountains, which remained contested territory between the French and Spanish until the late eighteenth century (Landers 2004). In the 1710s, French priest Jean-Baptiste Labat estimated there were six to seven hundred heavily armed women and men living at the Montagne Noir southeast of Port-au-Prince ([1722] 1724 v.2). In the southwestern peninsula, Nippes had been a stronghold for marronnage since a group of runaways fled there in 1681; among these rebels at Nippes was Plymouth, who along with thirty other maroons under his leadership were captured in a 1730 raid. After authorities arrested fourteen maroons at Mirebalais in 1740, it was revealed that all of them, along with seven who were killed and twenty-three others who escaped, had been "born in the forest" (Saint-Méry [1797] 1996; Fouchard 1972). The presence of these self-liberated communities, composed of women, men, and children—many of whom had never been enslaved, points to an intergenerational resistance struggle that spanned the Spanish and French colonial periods. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the island's politically and economically autonomous Black people who remained or were descendants of maroons from the Spanish colonial period had already waged, with some success, a long-term struggle against sugar slavery. The historical memory of that struggle and the early collaborations with the indigenous Taínos continued to be

part of the cultural landscape that welcomed newly arrived Africans under French rule at the turn of the eighteenth century, and later informed the mass rebellion that finally overturned European slavery and colonialism.

If the sixteenth and seventeenth century rebellion against the Spanish plantation system can be considered the first *Ayitian* Revolution, then the eighteenth century French sugar industry expansion represented a counter-revolution where the newly-named colony of Saint Domingue was rapidly outfitted with proto-industrialized plantations, and a violent, repressive regime of laws and policing that equated Blackness to enslavability. Saint Domingue was known as the crown jewel of the French monarchy, as capital from the slave trade and enslaved labor in Saint Domingue provided the economic basis for French bourgeoisie and helped to make France one of the wealthiest nations in the world. As European demands for sugar, as well as coffee and indigo, increased and the colony's 8,000 plantations became wildly profitable, enslavers further enflamed the slave trade, triggering African conflicts for control of the trade and funneling in hundreds of thousands of African captives—many of whom were former soldiers primed for revolt (Thornton 1991). Over the course of the eighteenth century, over 800,000 Africans were brought to Saint Domingue. Yet, ruthless production demands created material conditions that were so deadly that many new arrivals died within a short time frame; and by 1789, the enslaved population numbered 500,000 with two-third of these having been born on the African continent. Saint Domingue became the world's largest sugar producer and the most valuable slave colony in the Americas, and its wealth was funneled almost exclusively to France—inadvertently financing the French Revolution (James [1938] 1989).

As a labor force who “were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time” (James [1938] 1989: 86), Saint Domingue’s enslaved workers developed collective consciousness from their African origins, their shared experiences in the colony, and through their interactions in housing units, work spaces, Sunday markets and feast days, or during burial rites and sacred ritual gatherings. The unprecedented accumulation of capital, combined with financial mismanagement of plantations and economic crises stemming from European conflicts like the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, worsened conditions for the enslaved and further politicized their collective consciousness as they increasingly fled plantations as maroons. For example, during the American War for Independence, the British blockaded the American colonists’ French allies in Saint Domingue, halting the slave trade and other imports from 1776 until 1783. During that time, the colony also experienced extreme weather conditions, droughts followed by flooding, and food shortages. Several maroons took this wartime strain as an opportunity to secure their own freedom through military service. In the early 1780s, several runaways attempted to join the ranks of Comte Charles d’Estaing, the former colony governor and French naval officer who led the siege on Savannah, Georgia in 1779 with troops of freemen of color. An 18 year old named Jean-Pierre was suspected of taking refuge in the French king’s ships at harbor. Others, including Silvan, Michel, as well as two brothers Jean and Jean-

Baptiste Lefevre escaped their owners to attempt to board the ships of Comte d'Estaing.² Howard Winant argues “as capitalism, empire, and communication all experienced substantial growth, this growth also fueled emancipatory aspirations and potentialities” (Winant 1995: 52–53). In other words, the colony’s rapid economic development and growing Black population via the slave trade also facilitated an enhanced collective consciousness, the creation of maroon communities, and other liberated spaces where enslaved people, maroons, and some free people of color could participate in their sacred ritual and martial art activities, and to plan and organize rebellion.

Marronnage was, as Wynter argues, a “dialectical response to the capitalist plantation system” (Wynter n.d.: 73–74)—a system that aimed to deny humanity, severed social and cultural ties, and commodified people and their labor power. By reclaiming and liberating themselves, appropriating resources and land, and seeking to restore their social and cultural ties, maroons actualized Enlightenment ideals the revolutionary slogan of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*” well before the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man. In the immediate moments when enslaved people fled plantations, they reclaimed possession of themselves and other tangible and intangible resources such as their time, social relationships, knowledge, and labor skills that enslavers violently expropriated. Maroons remained at large for longer periods of time in the years leading to the Haitian Revolution, using their time to establish and nurture connections with other maroons and enslaved people and to coordinate revolts. Some of these network connections were established on slave ships as “shipmates” chained together remained in close contact, some were family and kin-based, and others were based on ethnic, cultural, or linguistic similarity. For example, five *nouveaux* or newly-arrived Africans from Mozambique were brought to Saint Domingue on Dalmus Gigot’s slave ship the *Joachim* on March 24, 1790. The five men escaped on April 17, 1790, shortly after disembarking at Cap-Français, likely in response to a particularly long and deadly voyage on the *Joachim* during which seventy-seven captives died.³ Louise and Marie-Noël were sisters born in the colony who took Louise’s two-year-old mixed-race daughter as they escaped a Grande-Rivière plantation in July of 1788.⁴ Two non-related women, Cerès and Junon, had been in the colony only for eighteen months, but found connection around their shared Kongolese identity to escape an Île-à-Vache plantation on October 4, 1787.⁵

Alternatively, enslaved people and maroons who were not previously connected by the Middle Passage, kinship, or heritage met each other on plantations, in living quarters, and in sacred ritual spaces, forming networks of solidarity around the common lived experiences of racialization, commodification, forced labor, and violence. Maroons also participated in actions that reversed the conditions of being dispossessed of the products of their labor or any economic autonomy, for example appropriating weapons, food, work tools, horses, boats, clothing, and money as they escaped or organized raids against plantations. A group of maroons from differing ethnic

² *Les affiches américaines* July 31, 1781; *Les affiches américaines* July 30, 1783.

³ *Les affiches américaines* April 28, 1790; The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

⁴ *Les affiches américaines* July 26, 1788.

⁵ *Les affiches américaines* November 1, 1787.

backgrounds escaped the Vedel plantation in Sal Trou in early spring 1787: Valentin, Paul, and Coacou/Coucou, each colony-born creoles; Jupiter, LaFortune, and Marianne, two men and a woman of the Kongo nation; and André of the Mina nation. Four of those maroons, Paul, Coucou, LaFortune, and André, were re-enslaved either from capture or they returned to the Vedel plantation voluntarily. Yet, they made another escape one year later on August 16, 1788, the night of a hurricane, this time recruiting a larger group of maroons: André of the Mina nation; Paul, Coffi, Coucou, Jacob, and Tranquillin, all colony-born creoles; Cabi, Valeri, Sans-Nom, Casimir, LaFortunte, Basile, Phanor, Hilaire, Catin, and Urgele, all of the Kongo nation; and Justine, a mixed-race creole woman. Authorities discovered the group after a pregnant maroon woman sought help in advance of her delivery; the information that she shared, undoubtedly under duress, led authorities to the maroon community where a shoot-out ensued. These rebels had formed a self-liberated settlement on lands owned by free man of color where they used their agricultural skills to grow coffee, cotton, corn, and other crops as they sought to be self-contained and prepared to protect themselves from attacks from the fugitive slave police, the *maréchaussée*.⁶

During and after the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, Africa-born rebels and maroons were central to the mobilizing structures that successfully fought to abolish slavery and overturn colonialism—representing an astounding rupture to the prevailing Atlantic world-system that was dependent upon enslaved labor. When maroons reclaimed themselves, re-appropriated resources, and mobilized themselves, they challenged and subverted the colonial plantation structures built upon exploitation and violence, contributing to the downfall of French imperial slavery in Haiti. The Vedel maroons' claims-staking to land for subsistence farming and autonomous labor predated similar claims by maroons at the Platons Kingdom in Haiti's Grand'Anse southern peninsula. Between late 1791 and 1792, thousands enslaved people deserted Grand'Anse plantations headed for Haiti's highest mountain range, Pic Macaya, where rebels mounted the military challenge to France's armies during key turning points of the Haitian Revolution such as LeClerc's 1802 incursions to restore slavery (Fick 1990).

Some rebel leaders had been maroons before the uprisings of 1791, such as Jean-François Papillon, who escaped in 1787 before becoming a commander in the north. Other rebels from plantations across northern Haiti gathered at the Bwa Kayman sacred ritual ceremony of August 1791 to conspire against the plantation system, and to solidify their solidarity with African-based oaths of secrecy and supplications to the spirit world for protection during the impending revolt. Figures like Boukman Dutty, Georges Biassou, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Hyacinthe Ducoudray, Romaine "La Prophetess" Rivière, and other rebels were also known for utilizing sacred ritual practices and technologies during warfare, and incorporating maroons into their ranks. Over time, various colonial-era sacred practices culminated in what would become the religion of Haitian Vodou, which continued to symbolize oppositional consciousness and politics among the masses

⁶ *Les affiches américaines* March 1, 1787; "Dénonciation que fait M. Lamothe Vedel de ses Nègres marrons, & des faits résultants de leur marronnage, Le 6 Avril 1791," *Gazette de Saint Domingue* Vol. 1 April 13, 1791, p. 382, John Carter Brown Library; "Avis divers" and "suivent les annexes," *Supplement à la Gazette de St. Domingue*, August 27, 1791, p. 839, John Carter Brown Library; see also Fouchard 1972: 254–255.

of Haitian people for decades to come. Women revolutionaries provided sacred protections to men, such as Cécile Fatiman who led the Bwa Kayman ceremony and other *mambos*, or priestesses, who refused to divulge the secrets and whereabouts of male rebels. Women also strategically used marronnage to travel across the colony, linking various plantations by operating as nurses, spies, and couriers who smuggled weapons and food. In November 1790, a creole woman named Magdeleine escaped her owner in Petit Goave while disguised as a man and claiming to be free, presumably to join the rebel leader Hyacinthe Ducoudray, “with whom she had a habit of associating.”⁷ Similarly, Charlotte, an African woman of the Poulard nation, was known as the romantic partner of Jean-François Papillon and escaped the Papillon property in March 1791. By August 1791, she had been in fugitivity for five months; the advertisement announcing her escape stated “she often changes quarters: we believe her currently to be in Port-au-Prince or its surroundings; she is presenting herself as a free woman.”⁸ While Magdeleine and Charlotte’s activities while they were in fugitivity is yet unknown, their self-liberation from slavery and their intimate connections to rebel leaders suggests they were likely involved in the planning and execution of the Haitian Revolution.

Haitian anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot (1995) has argued that over the course of the revolutionary struggle, a “war within the war” emerged where many formerly enslaved and free Black and mixed-race military officers elevated their economic and political statuses and diverged from the immediate interests of the formerly enslaved masses. After the 1793 emancipation, the French commissioner Étienne Poverel implemented regulations for the formerly enslaved masses requiring them to work as “cultivators,” freed people who would sustain the colony’s economic viability through plantation work in exchange for a small amount of pay, a shorter work week, and freedom from the threat of physical violence as punishment. Later during Toussaint Louverture’s tenure as governor, plantations were militarized to ensure production, much to the dismay of the free cultivators who, like the Vedel maroons, preferred to consume and locally trade the items they produced rather than producing crops for export trade (Fick 1990). Cultivators consistently protested these new labor codes with work slowdowns, marronnage, revolts, and women demanded pay equal to their male counterparts. For example, in 1801, cultivators’ revolts sprang up in the northern plain, and Toussaint’s adopted nephew Moïse, an agricultural inspector, was believed to have led or supported the uprisings. Moïse was a popular leader among the cultivators and often exhibited solidarity with them, refusing to physically punish them for lower productivity levels and diligently ensuring that they received their portions of plantation revenues before higher-ranking personnel. Louverture sent officers to repress the rebellions, even ordering the execution of Moïse and other officers for his perceived treason and his potential threat to Louverture’s authority (James [1938] 1989; Fick 1990; Dubois 2004).

Yet, it was these formerly enslaved laborers and maroons who formed the basis of the armed resistance when officers like Jean-Jacques Dessalines defected from the insurgent army and sided

⁷ *Les affiches américaines* November 13, 1790.

⁸ *Gazette de Saint Domingue* Vol. 2, August 6, 1791, p. 776, John Carter Brown Library.

with the French after Toussaint Louverture was captured and exiled. These maroons drew solidarity and support from the cultivators, and therefore opposed the strict plantation labor codes that Louverture previously endorsed with uprisings throughout the colony. As a French officer, Dessalines then led the charge against African-born maroon leaders like Sylla, Jean-Baptiste Sans-Souci, Makaya, Lamour Derance, Noël Mathieu, Va Malheureux, and others who refused to capitulate to French rule. It was not until it became clear that French troops were intent on restoring slavery that these officers again sided with the Indigenous Army of masses under Dessalines' leadership in a collective effort to finally expel the French and declare Haitian independence in 1804 (Fick 1990; Trouillot 1995; Girard 2011).

Yet, this solidarity unraveled in the wake of Dessalines' assassination in 1806, as colonial logics and the dominance of the global economic system continued to inform post-independence era formations and the class and color-based rifts that foregrounded the "war within the war." During the post-independence era, newly-formed Haitian governments, especially in the south, replicated aspects of colonial administrations, as Haitian sociologist Jean Casimir (2020) points out: "during the three and a half decades of the governments of [presidents Alexandre] Pétion and [Jean-Pierre] Boyer, the behavior of the highest spheres of the intermediary class toward the cultivators was characterized by the same staggering flippancy and lack of respect shown by the colonial authorities" (Casimir 2020: 62). The formerly enslaved masses of Haiti were excluded from participation in formal state structures, instead they organized themselves into what Casimir (2001, 2015, 2020) calls a counter-plantation system: networks of communal social arrangements called *lakous*—extended kin networks of subsistence labor, landownership, and the religion of Haitian Vodou. This organic social system ran counter to the logics and mandates of the plantation system and persisted well into the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century cultivators also continued to rely on marronnage to protest exploitative economic practices—symbolized by the saying "you signed my name, but you haven't signed my feet" (Sheller 2012: 166). Their withdrawal from plantation labor, and therefore from the capitalist world-system, harkened to colonial and revolutionary-era maroon formations and shaped the nature of the country's sense of popular sovereignty (Roberts 2015; Gonzalez 2019; Casimir 2020). Casimir (2020) identifies the revolt of former maroon and revolutionary Jean-Baptiste "Goman" DuPerrier in southern Haiti as a significant challenge to the Haitian state's limitations.

Goman headed peasant revolts in the southern Grande' Anse region against Alexandre Pétion and Jean-Pierre Boyer's republic until 1819. Goman had been a maroon at the Platons Kingdom and a leader of the resistance against the French incursion of 1802, exemplifying Haiti's *longue-durée* maroon struggle against the world-system. After Dessalines was assassinated in 1806, several revolutionary leaders sought to occupy the vacuum of power, leading the country into civil war. The northern monarchy of Haiti operated under the rule of King Henry Christophe, while Alexandre Pétion was president of the southern republic of Haiti. With a newly freed and independent, but fractured state of Haiti, dissatisfied peasant farmers took up arms against the elite who controlled city of Jérémie in 1807. Goman's insurgency wrested control over several coastal towns and the inlands by establishing linkages between collaborators and securing resources from

them, and revisited maroon-like tactics such as pillaging and burning plantations. He eventually settled at a village named Grand Doko with large subsistence farming grounds near Jérémie.

Though Christophe and Pétion ruled different sections of the country, there were sympathizers for both in opposing areas and Goman developed an alliance with Christophe in opposition to Pétion. Pétion launched several unsuccessful campaigns against Goman, and in 1813 southern troops burned all the housing quarters and garden plots at Grand Doko. Goman's soldiers were likely veterans of the Haitian Revolution, they staged ambushes and traps then retreated into the woods, leaving Goman to rule for another six years. Though he outlived Pétion, who died in 1818, Goman faced a formidable opponent when Jean-Pierre Boyer became president and almost immediately sought to regain control of Grand Anse. Meanwhile, the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson sent letters to Henry Christophe encouraging the king to make peace with Boyer, fearing that Boyer would ally with France if antagonisms between the north and south persisted and that the country would be vulnerable to a French invasion—and to re-enslavement. Following Clarkson's advice to make peace, Christophe ([1767–1820] 1952) assured Clarkson that he would not intervene in Boyer's campaign against Goman. Without support from Christophe and facing Boyer's troops in the south, Goman was isolated. The majority of the Grand Doko rebels submitted to Boyer at the end of June 1819 and the peasant-led quasi-republic had effectively been put down. Goman and two other officers evaded capture, and while some contend Goman likely succumbed to wounds from the fighting, local lore suggests the three men, Goman, Malfait, and Malfou leapt to their deaths into a ravine rather than be caught (Madiou 1847–1848; Gonzalez 2019). Their deaths represented the end of what Trouillot's "war within the war," and the defeat of the last revolutionary *bossale*.

Though maroons and their tactics had helped to dismantle slavery and colonial regimes, by the early nineteenth century, the legacy and continuation of marronnage and the agricultural class's lifeways were perceived as a threat to Haiti's security from internal stability and French invasion and re-enslaving. Goman's insurrection revealed the political conflicts between the monarchal and republican governments, and "only deepened the fracture between the oligarchs and the masses" (Casimir 2020: 49). As Jean Casimir (2020) has argued, post-independence era Haitian governments failed to fully incorporate and to develop according to the needs of the masses of formerly enslaved people. Therefore, the Goman movement represented "the population's successful control over resources" that "laid the foundations for a form of peasant autonomy" (Casimir 2020: 62) in spite of state limitations.

Conclusion

The Atlantic world-economic system was built on the commodification and exploitation of enslaved African descendants' bodies, reproduction, and physical labor. Marronnage was the most consistent form of resistance across the Americas including Haiti, where it effectively contributed to downfall of Spanish colonial slavery in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and the demise of French colonial slavery in the nineteenth century. Therefore, *longue-durée* trajectory of

marronnage in colonial and early post-independence Haiti represented a continuous struggle against imperial formations of enslaving, forced and exploited labor, violence, and death. The dimensions of marronnage as an anti-capitalist resistance means of grassroots mobilizing and a socio-political critique developed over the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in response to changing imperial forces and slaving practices, culminating in Haiti's monumental achievement of an anti-slavery, anti-colonial revolution that brought about the first free and independent Black nation in the Americas.

Yet, at the time of Haiti's independence, the world-economy was still reliant deeply reliant on slaving, exploitation, and anti-Black racism, which invariably reinforced a climate in Haiti that harkened to colonial-era formations. The pressures of this explicit hostility threatened the sovereignty of the Haitian state, which was coerced into capitulating to the capitalist and militaristic dominance of slaving, colonial nations—the 1825 indemnity of 150 million *francs* that France imposed on Haiti to compensate former enslavers is a preeminent example of this coercion. While Haiti was rendered largely economically and politically isolated throughout most of the nineteenth century, the state continued to repress rather than include the agricultural class and the forms of popular sovereignty they expressed. Therefore, the persistence of marronnage across time periods, including early nineteenth century Goman's rebellion, exposed the violence, exploitation, and oppression inherently embedded in the Euro-American dominated Atlantic world-system and exposed the limits of the governing Haitian states. But perhaps more importantly, the character of marronnage in the form of the Haitian people's counter-plantation system, points toward alternatives of human organizing around egalitarian, sustainable principles. Though these practical aspects of marronnage and the counter-plantation culture have not been fully acknowledged or integrated into the state apparatus, the people of Haiti continue to challenge the state, and to make and re-make their worlds through Vodou, Kreyol, *lakou* collectivity, and social movements such as the PetroCaribe protests that attempt to meet their everyday social, economic, and political needs.

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