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BLACK SLAVERY, CLASS STRUGGLE, FEAR AND REVOLUTION IN ST. DOMINGUE AND CUBA, 1785-1795

By

Clarence J. Munford and Michael Zeuske*

The 1990s commemorate the bicentennial of the cataclysmic revolution in St. Domingue, 1791-1804. The West Indies vibrated to the political, ideological, and social-psychological echoes of an explosion ignited by black men and women. The reverberations from this event, history's sole victorious slave revolution, triggered spasms of fear among slaveholders throughout the Caribbean and in adjacent mainland territories, whose United States repercussions were ably summarized by Herbert Aptheker a half century ago.¹ As the nearest insular neighbor, Cuba in particular—coincidentally caught up in a sensitive economic transition of its own—was gripped by a peculiar kind of ambivalent paranoia. It strained in dialectics of immunization—military intervention; of disengagement—Machiavellian diplomatic ploys; of dread—gleeful opportunism. Yet throughout, Haiti remained the scene of the highest drama.

The shining pearl in Louis XVI's colonial tiara was Saint Domingue together with its Tortuga, Gonave, and Ile à Vaches attachments.² The economic survey contained in Moreau de Saint-Méty 1797 *Description*³ depicts a stalwart mechanism for the production of staple commodities based on the ruthless exploitation of masses of black slaves, supplemented by an array of handicraft manufactories, including lime-burning furnaces, brickyards, tanneries, and rum distilleries. Slaves were the overwhelmingly predominant source of labor in an agricultural economy, numbering some 50 cocoa farms, 3,117 coffee plantations born of the late eighteenth century coffee boom, and more than 3,000 small indigo farms. Over the whole some 793 sugar works reigned supreme, the larger ones ranging in size from 300 to 1,000 hectares. This mechanism churned out streams of wealth for both the resident and the absentee slaveholders, as well as for the deeply implicated commercial bourgeoisie camped along France's Atlantic seaboard.⁴

Why did both Louis XV (1715-1774) and Louis XVI (1774-1782) regard St. Domingue as the most precious gem in the realm? For the most solidly material reasons. Ten years after the mass black uprising, Pierre-François Page drew a retrospective *bilan*.⁵ The "Pearl of the Antilles" endowed France each year towards the end of the *ancien régime* with tropical commodities amounting to at least 210 million *livres tournois*. Atlantic slave trading and French exports to the West Indies stoked this productive furnace with resources totalling some 113 million *livres*, a

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figure that swelled to 197 million *livres* when various freight, financial, service, and other charges were included. The addition of conservative estimates of the value of the business of foreign traders and smugglers in St. Domingue waters raised the colony's annual worth to France to the range of some 500 million *livres*. This was no paltry sum, for the total value of French imports and exports from the whole of Asia and the eastern Mediterranean together barely exceeded 118 million *livres*. In the Western hemisphere, neither Brazil, nor Peru, nor Mexico—huge territories—produced as much wealth for their colonial masters as St. Domingue, convincing some that little St. Domingue as of 1788 had been to France what fabulous India was to Great Britain. It led the world in sugar and coffee production (annual crops of 80,000 tons and 40,000 tons, respectively), enabling sugar refining industries to spring up along the Loire river from Nantes to Orleans, creating the product for a vast re-export trade which blanketed European markets from Amsterdam and Rotterdam to Hamburg and Bremen, and from Stettin and Danzig to Stockholm and St. Petersburg. Such was the tribute paid to Europe by captive Africans.

Slave labor was the decisive element in Saint Domingue's productive forces; the knowledge, production experience, and skills possessed by the slaves were indispensable. Yet the dependence on slavery had grown so all-encompassing that slaves even dominated the colony's retail trade, despite the *ad hoc* and extralegal character of the traffic. Servile domination of retail turnover was so complete by the year 1789 that slave retailers wielded a quasi-veto over currency reform. When in the spring of the year authorities moved to inject devaluated copper coins into the economy, the slaves whose "alimentary commodities" were "feeding the towns"⁶ reacted with such distrust that the scheme was nullified. It collapsed, under the economic weight of the retailers' united resistance:

The first time that the slaves would present themselves at the markets, should superior force oblige them to accept this coin as change, this class of men . . . knowing only their masters, would suffer punishment rather than sacrifice its interest, and would expose itself only this once, for there is among the Negroes an astonishing harmony in matters of trade.⁷

The slaveholders countenanced and even encouraged this retail commerce, while at the same time compelling their slaves to provide their own food, clothing, and other necessities, under a notorious system of part-time and after-hours provisions gardening. By means of this regime, a semi-feudal-resemblant, proto strip-farming peasant complex crept into the interstices of the slave mode of production, as it were, roughly calling European *paysans parcellaires* to mind—if the allusion is not overdone—even more so, since the system entailed certain neo-collective practices among gardening slaves that were reminiscent of the pre-revolutionary French village commune.⁸ The provisions gardening system functioned in the hope of swelling the net product of slave labor to the maximum by depressing production costs to the minimum. The slaveholders hoped to accomplish this by forcing slaves to maintain themselves at no cost to their owners. This was futile hope, for try as they would, the rapacious exploiters were never able to make the average field hand produce as much as demanded.⁹

Living and working conditions were so grisly in the French West Indies that after 160 years and more of slavery, the black population still could not be maintained by

natural means. With the devilish mortality, slave demography on the eve of the revolution was still dominated by forced immigration. Most of the 800,000 to 1,000,000 Africans imported into Saint Domingue between the peace of Utrecht in 1713 and 1790, had soon perished. Nevertheless, transatlantic delivery was so brisk in the final stage from 1774 to 1790 that the living slave population jumped from 240,000 to somewhere between 465,000 and 485,000.¹⁰

The North province remained the economic leader, and there slavery was most vulnerable. More startling were the facts that the slave population had grown by more than 30,000 in just one year and that the number of urban slaves in Saint Domingue now exceeded 17,000.¹¹ This progression was the cause for self-congratulation among high colonial administrators. They viewed it as evidence that planter demands for laborers were at long last being met.¹² All told there were in 1789 more than 90,000 new slaves already at work in production, every one of whom had been seized from Africa within the preceding three years.¹³ These newcomers were still totally unreconciled to slavery. Unwilling to accept the degradation imposed upon them, these "bossal" newcomers were destined to play an explosive role in the coming events. In 1789 the number of captives fresh from Africa was double that in 1788.¹⁴

Holding all these blacks in tether were some 40,000 whites, outnumbered more than ten to one, themselves deeply divided by bitter class and political antagonisms. The estrangement gnawing at the mulattoes, a substantial group of inhabitants, added tinder to the volatile mix. Meanwhile, in ultramarine Versailles, deputy Bouche announced with olympian calm in the National Assembly on June 27, 1789 that the question of the abolition of slavery must be put off pending more tranquil times!¹⁵

Relations among the various classes, factions, and strata of the free were tangled in a manner conducive to the revolutionary situation. Being slaves, the immense majority of the population were political and legal nullities in French absolute monarchical jurisprudence.¹⁶ Distinct in the legal sense were the white colonists, and distinct in a physical as well as legal sense were the mulattoes (*gens de couleur*) and the corps of black freedmen who had formerly been enslaved. Deep divisions among the whites pitted the powerful landed slaveholders—*grands blancs*, secure in their wealth and arrogant in carriage—against a motley troupe of plantation overseers, stewards and managers, of artisans, petty merchants and shopkeepers, of townsmen, non-French European immigrants, many *déclassé* and felonious, *et al.*—the whole nervous cauldron of *petits blancs*. The clique of expatriate colonial officials raised the ire of the creole notables. Resident planters were jealous of absentee landholding nabobs. Bureaucratic heralds of an ultramarine-focussed imperial centralization drew bitter fire from the enemies of the *Exclusif*. By 1789, nobles, including some of the highest ranking court aristocrats in the realm, owned the lion's share of slaveholding plantations throughout the French West Indies.¹⁷ White or mulatto, in all three provinces, small *colons*, those with less than twenty slaves, hated and envied the *grand blanc* aristocracy, encountering disdain and ridicule in return.¹⁸ Prisoners to a festering belief in the sacrosanctity of white skin privilege, holding "coloreds" and blacks, freedmen as well as slaves, in utter racist contempt, they coveted the property of the slaveowning mulattoes. When the time came, the small *colons* mo-

bilized and led the *petits blancs* in a frothy political rebellion which got out of hand, and helped make it impossible for the slaveholding elite to go on ruling in the old manner: "This class of citizens, carried far beyond the submission owed to the laws in the first rush of liberty, have been supported in this agitation by the baneful proceedings of the Saint Marc assembly," rose the wail in 1790.¹⁹

Mulattoes claimed to own one of every four slaves in the colony and thus had a large material interest in preserving slavery. This further muddled class-political relations, reducing the scope of Vincent Ogé's mulatto uprising in 1790, making it narrow and egoistic and isolating it from the slaves.²⁰ Yet at the same time white slaveholders, ironically, could never shake the fear that at least some of the freedmen—mulattoes as well as blacks—would come to realize the advantage to themselves of solidarity with the slaves and would join the latter in an assault against the entire social edifice.²¹

These misgivings were compounded by the increasingly ambiguous role of the black headmen or foremen of the field slaves. Although carefully screened for cringing obedience and loyalty to the master, the latter were more and more prone to weave secret bonds of solidarity, influence, and empathy with their charges. This was an unavoidable consequence of the sudden influx of so many new slaves from Africa. The newcomers understood no creole patois or French. This meant that in order to communicate work commands to them, it made sense to begin to look for *commandeurs* hailing from West Africa.²² But these men, native Africans, were less inured to slavery than creole headmen born on the plantation, and they were closer in spirit to the field hands. The danger to the slave system was imminent. Thus class contradictions in Saint Domingue were sorely aggravated in a unique fashion by skin color prejudice. While law forbade the reduction of any white person to slavery, one of the two main antagonistic classes in the society—the slaves—consisted of black-skinned Africans, along with a few mulattoes. Ranged on the other side of the social barrier, the other main class, the slaveholders, were predominantly white. The intermediate classes were white (*petits blancs*) and *gens de couleur* (mulattoes and black freedmen).

The working conditions endured by the slaves were lethal enough by themselves alone. However, their mortal consequences were compounded by chronic hunger, disease, terrible housing, inadequate clothing, and poor hygiene.

In a way the slaveholding class' cruel frenzy is explained by the fact that despite constantly intensifying their charges' labor, despite successive campaigns to rationalize management in the second half of the century, the productivity of slave labor remained stubbornly low. Although they were not feeling the squeeze like their British counterparts in Jamaica and Antigua, where the soil was less fertile and more overworked than in St. Domingue, nevertheless with huge markets in France and the rest of continental Europe, and indirectly even in England itself, the sugar barons drew the connection between productivity and profit. Moreover, they had mountains of debts to pay. Thus while the productivity of slave labor in St. Domingue's sugar and coffee estates from the 1770s on was proverbially the highest in the West Indies, the planters were convinced that they could raise it higher still. Ironically, it was precisely this presumption, and the gyrations to fulfil it, which armed the Abolitionists in the ideological tussle with slavery. The latter argued "the infallible conse-

quence of the demonstration of the fact [of low productivity] that a free hand fertilizes the soil better than a slave hand."²³

The class of slaves itself consisted of three main fractions—field hands (the vast majority), skilled craftsmen, and domestic servants. Secondary divisions distinguished *bossal* from creole, and one ethno-tribal group from another. Conditions on sugar estates were not identical with those on coffee or indigo farms, and there were subtle differences in the lives of slaves from region to region, with slaves in the West and South subsisting on sweet potatoes and millet while those in the North ate cassava, for instance. Yet the organic fractionalization was fundamental, and the planters bolstered it by imposing the new divisions of labor and assigning new jobs. By these means, the elemental fractionalization of the class was manipulated in such a way as to cement an ethno-racial and occupational hierarchy among the slaves, designed to counteract any class consciousness and feelings of solidarity. For this reason, job allocations according to presumed ethno-tribal origins (although in most instances this merely meant port of embarkation) started as soon as the seasoning began, as it were, “streaming” captives upon whom traces of the Middle Passage were still visible.

By the spring of 1789, those plantations which depended on food from France to feed their slaves were in more than usual straits, for bitter winter had iced French Atlantic ports, delaying the departure of supply ships to the West Indies, “leaving the Colony . . . exposed,” in the words of St. Domingue’s two highest officials, “to the innumerable misfortunes that the lack of provisions will inevitably bring.”²⁴ Matters could hardly be worse, they added morosely, for, rare occurrence, both the colony and the mother country, although separated by an ocean expanse, were the simultaneous victims of natural catastrophes which destroyed food crops. In the spring of 1786, the South and West provinces were ripped by a famine which did horrible damage to the black inhabitants. The hurricane of August 1788 had been followed in St. Domingue by long-lasting drought, driving the already famished slaves to the brink of starvation.²⁵ “One informs us that the negroes [sic] are poorly fed on some plantations, and that outrages result and even the death of slaves,” understated one intendant in feigned naivety.²⁶ Foreseeing disastrous consequences, the authorities grew very nervous, especially inasmuch as the supply of salted fish fed to the slaves dwindled in the spring of the year.²⁷ For this reason, the governor favored American fish imports.²⁸ Even the startling news of the fall of the Bastille fell on distracted ears in Port-au-Prince, the seat of colonial administration and main economic center in the West province, for “this dispatch has reached us at a moment when food supplies are still very scarce in this colony,” admitted a distraught officialdom.²⁹ With a terrible drought that looked as though it would never end, with the cane withering in the sun, with the vegetation drying up, with blacks dying of thirst—how long could the slaves be held in tether?³⁰

Cruelty stalked the slave at every stage of his career. It began with the notorious “seasoning” of new slaves, a cruel process of physical abuse stretching over three years, a period of inculcation of labor routine and spirit-breaking psyche pulverization. This procedure took the lives of 15 to 20 percent; epidemic disease could often inflate mortality to a full one-third of blacks fresh from Africa.³¹ Mental cruelty was firmly institutionalized, the worst from emotional stress occasioned by the

forced separation of families, of mothers from children. In 1786 a St. Domingue court nonchalantly clapped a “negress and children” in jail while it leisurely deliberated as to which of two estranged white spouses the woman and babes— together or separately—should be awarded as chattel property in a divorce settlement.³² Vying with such pressures, slaves were often driven out of their mind, prompting present owners to try to fob them off on previous owners, for the law made insanity grounds to annul the sale of a slave. For instance, a court order of 1786 aimed at the owners of a cargo including “the said [sic] negro seized suddenly by lunacy . . . sentence[d] the parties . . . to pay and reimburse the sum of 1350 [*livres*] the price of the sale of the Negro. . . . [T]his is not to say that the purchaser must prove that the Negro was struck by this malady before the sale . . . but the malady [being] confirmed, the sale must be rescinded, witness the judgement of the standing order of 11 January 1773 and the decree of 19 February 1779.”³³

Add to this burden sexual harassment of the worst sort. Sexual abuse of female slaves was nearly universal. Its nefarious effects were felt right up to the insurrection of 1791 and beyond. As one observer put it, “the plantations are nearly all so many large harems for their Owners, *Procureurs*, Managers, Stewards.”³⁴ Helpless to shield their mates from degradation, male slaves were eaten by anxiety, jealousy, and despair, estranging them from their wives, causing separation and divorce, and stirring emotions of vengeance against white men. “Also, it was noted that fear and hope prevent[ed] the Slave from refusing the desires of her Master; there ensue[d] a scandalous deprivation of morals, often involving troublesome consequences and abominable atrocities.”³⁵ As though the shortage of black women, in comparison to black men were not enough, undernourishment coupled with the backbreaking workload shouldered by pregnant women gave rise to sterility, abortion, soaring infant mortality, and demographic collapse, manifested as a permanent surplus of deaths over births.

Super-exploitation of slave labor and robbing the blacks of their life force made it impossible to sustain the population by natural means, and the more perspicacious colonial administrators knew it: take the evidence of Chilleau, who informed his principals in Versailles that “at least 10,000 negroes [sic] are needed to put the labor gangs of the French part of St. Domingue in the state they should be. One notices every day that the population of Africa diminishes and in all the colonies births are very far from equalling deaths.”³⁶

Through it all, despite claims to the contrary, the institution of slavery was hardening rather than loosening, as the *ancien regime* approached its final agony—much as the Aristocratic Reaction in France itself hardened noble exclusiveness on the eve of the Revolution. It froze over in the legal presumption of slave status for anyone with a black skin. The onus of proving freedom lay on the claimant, reiterated the court in 1786: “It is to him who wishes [to escape] from Slavery to prove his liberty.”³⁷ Meanwhile, the remaining avenues to the emancipation of individuals were slamming closed. By the 1780s, residence in France, “where the name of Slave is unknown”³⁸—a rule dating back to the reign of Henry III (1574-1589)—was no longer accepted as setting a black person free, and new ordinances were drawn up, at once excluding them from continental France and prohibiting their return to the colonies as free men.

As manumission dried up, more and more slaves fled from the plantations, both individuals and groups. Since the early 1770s, it was common to glimpse runaways lurking in the shadows along the fringes of the plantations, raiding nocturnally for provisions and weapons. Deep in the interior, in the hills and mountains and along the Spanish border, glowered whole encampments of hardy fighters, St Domingue's "*quilombus*", Maniel the most renowned. These intrepid warriors held the bounty-hunters at bay. Eluding the mounted constabulary, they struck out in forays against the plantations, liberating slave women and burning cane fields. The maroons itched for the signal to strike a mortal blow against slavery. Increasingly revolutionary instincts told them that the whole edifice was rooted in clay. In July 1789 colonial officials warned that "in depriving slaves of the prospect of freedom," the policy of stopping manumission would merely swell the number of runaways."³⁹ North, west and south, the mountains of Limbé, Plaisance, Les Matheux, and Les Platons, areas riddled with sinkholes, caves and caverns, ideal underground hideouts, were already seething with maroons.⁴⁰ From about mid-century on, coffee farming had been invading the hills and bluffs, encroaching on terrain that had previously harbored runaways. Nevertheless, there still remained plenty of safe refuges in St. Domingue's rugged topography. Back-country planters and merchant travellers reported that the Spaniards across the east frontier were once again letting runaways from the French part of the island hide on their territory, and that the news was stirring a ferment among the slaves.⁴¹

Resistance proliferated on all sides, within plantations and outside plantations. In fact, since the end of the Seven Years' War, observers had been struck by the growing endeavors of slaves to lift the yoke of servitude. Entire gangs deserted the plantations, fleeing to the mountains and forests. Many stayed in the vicinity where "they seduced the negroes [sic] of neighboring plantations, arming themselves with muskets, with ammunition and on all sides spreading alarm, murder and havoc."⁴² The colonial government had feared a "general insurrection" on several occasions during the thirty years prior to the real explosion, concluded a retrospective report in 1791.⁴³ Now, although the highest crown officials had their seat in Port-au-Prince, the economic and cultural capital of eighteenth-century St. Domingue was Le Cap François [Cap Haitien today]. Located on the northern shore facing the Atlantic, with well-developed port facilities, it was within close proximity of the Santo Domingo border, the bay of Manzanillo and the Spanish town of Montecristi. More important was its immediate hinterland. In a tight semi-circle stretching east and west were the towns of Le Borgne, Port Margot, Limbé, Limonade, and Fort Dauphin, satellites of the Cap in that richest of plantation regions—the Plaine du Nord. During the eighteenth century, overland communications between Cap François and distant Port-au-Prince were impeded by the intervening Massif du Nord mountain range. As of 1789, Cap François had the largest population in the colony, and its combined sugar and coffee exports still surpassed Port-au-Prince's total exports.

Early in 1785 Cap François was disturbed by a crafty ring of slave burglars who had the cooperation of some free blacks. There were five leaders, one a *bossal* from the Congo, another a recidivist maroon. A soldier from the Cap François regiment and two freedmen, one a mattress-maker, the other a creole wig-maker, were ac-

cused of aiding and abetting the band. White-owned houses were broken into and burgled, furniture and personal effects removed, full in the middle of town. A white man fenced the goods, but being white he got off with a fine of 1000 *livres*. Court records complained that not only were there more and more infractions, but that slaves in general were showing contempt for the property of white people.⁴⁴ "Assassinations are growing frequent," testified a Cap François shipping agent in November 1785, and planters feared attack even on the main highways.⁴⁵ As the Revolution approached, physical attacks against slaveholders mirrored the stepped-up resistance to the slavery regime.

Covert appropriation of items—deemed "theft" by the planters—also proliferated. Slaves challenged slaveholder property in a crescendo that distressed the slavocracy. How else to explain the animal-like fright of one local court in early 1786? It had just learned that three slave confederates, one a woman, had sawed a hole in the gable of a white man's house in the market town of Limbé and made off with merchandise.⁴⁶ This banal infraction caused mortal terror. The savage legal reprisal which ensued was a sign of growing nervousness. The overreaction was so disproportionate that it was overruled by an appeals court, but it was indicative of growing anxiety among slaveholders.

A few pistol shots fired by the armed maroons haunting the bluffs above the river Jalée were enough to cause an uproar in December 1785 in all the surrounding plantations. Slaveholders were now living on the permanent *qui vive*. When the night marauders pegged warning stakes at the front door of several mansions, skittish planters feared that their last hour had indeed arrived.⁴⁷ As the tension mounted, slaves sometimes even killed slaves. For instance, early in 1786 in the Abbé carpentry shop in Port-au-Prince a rebel suddenly turned on a co-worker and slew him with a chisel. He was fed up with his victim's spying for the master.⁴⁸ In the Dondon district, one of the colony's seventeen regional subdivisions, the Grendré estate's white manager and factotum himself owned a black slave, LaFortune by name. The latter grew weary of bondage in May 1786 and seizing a blade stabbed his oppressor in the chest and side.⁴⁹ In this locale such events were doubly sensitive for Dondon, due south of the Cap and close to the Spanish frontier, nestled in rugged terrain conducive to maroon activity.

The mulatto revolt in 1790 could not escape the attention of the slaves. Mulattoes were nearly as numerous in the colony as whites, and many were deeply implicated in the slaveholding system. The Aristocratic Reaction which prologued the Revolution in France was mirrored in the West Indies by surging color prejudice against "free coloreds" perpetrated by all the *blancs*, *petits*, and *grands*. Increasingly miffed by the restrictive racism, some mulattoes competed successfully in the arts and crafts against hostile poor whites; others managed to scrape together enough to purchase small farms, and still others ran small shops and taverns. The mulatto elite consisted, in its lowest fraction, of overseers hired to exact sweat and toil from slaves and, in its highest fraction, of slaveowners in their own right, a few of whom, Raymond for example, had grown quite wealthy. Yet by the eve of 1789, the mulatto elite has been stripped of the few symbols of honor and distinction that had once been theirs. Access to lucrative posts, civilian and military, slammed shut. Although militia duty—considered onerous by many—remained compulsory, mulat-

toes could no longer hold command, and they were now also excluded from commissions in the regular army. Saddled with an insulting dress code and excluded from certain occupations, mulattoes watched as education for their children was curtailed. Refused deliberative voice, their interests were not even formally represented in the colonial assemblies. Wealthy mulattoes watched in growing anger as local assemblies came to be dominated in the groundswell of 1789 by the very *petits blancs* they despised. These grievances were prominent in the 1790 uprising.⁵⁰

Articulate and fiery, Vincent Ogé spent a turbulent year in revolutionary Paris before returning home to St. Domingue via England. He was determined to win full civil rights for his class. Rallying a small army of 600 mulattoes and a few blacks, he placed himself at its head towards the end of October 1790. Seconded by Chavannes, a comrade of broader political vision, Ogé set out to disarm the whites and swell the ranks of his followers. The rebels occupied plantations in North province.⁵¹ But Chavannes warned that without a firm alliance with the slaves the revolt would soon fizzle. Tragically, Ogé remained a prisoner to traditional mulatto color-caste prejudice. He rejected any appeal to blacks, instead trumpeting devotion to slavery. Thus isolated by its own top leader, spurning the support of its natural allies, the insurgent force was smashed by the Cap François militia. Meanwhile, the blacks bided their time. In the words of one official, the example of mulatto revolt encouraged "slackness" on the part of the slaves.

As the revolutionary crisis heated to explosion, slave expectations mounted. Hardly had accounts been settled with Ogé when the planters heard, with disquiet, of aggressive gatherings of slaves on the Fabre plantation in Port-Salut and in Plaine des Cayes, in the extreme south.⁵² Had the mulattoes spread the germ? In this hothouse of political emotion, the news of the revolution in France acted as a detonator: "Have no doubt," prophesied Brissot on behalf of the *Amis des Noirs*, "our happy revolution must re-electrify the blacks whom vengeance and resentment have long since electrified. . . ."⁵³ In no time at all the colony heard the news that an abolitionist movement had appeared in France. Soon its influence began to agitate the slaves. "The greatest misgivings concern the blacks," warned a Cap François correspondent in November 1789, "They are informed that one seeks means to set them free. . . ."⁵⁴ Returning home, mulatto craftsmen brought news of happenings that piqued the curiosity of slaves. Bastard sons of planters, these mulatto shoemakers, cabinet makers, carpenters, saddlers, and tailors were themselves still slaves in the legal sense. Having spent long years of apprenticeship in France, however, and having drunk the heady wine of revolution and digested the ideas of equality, there was no chance they would prove content with their old appointed notch in society. The plantations bubbled, as the spectacle of mulattoes and free blacks demanding civil and political rights galvanized slaves, stoking their own ambitions.

So the slaves invented tales to boost their own spirits and feed their own yearnings, tales of an amazingly selective political expedience. The story went round that the king of Spain had proclaimed something called a "Pragmatic Sanction," promising freedom to any slave who would rally to his banner.⁵⁵ Reports of growing abolitionist sentiment in France were encoded by slaves to mean that whites had learned to fear blacks, and that if white men were now afraid of them, then blacks should show self-respect and pride. In December 1789 planters heard the report that many

field hands were now convinced that they were being held in slavery *contrary* to the will of the sovereign, that Louis XVI had already been induced to mark the “day of jubilee,” but that the slaveholders were illegally withholding the news.⁵⁶ As soon as it arrived in St. Domingue, the slaves were excited even by that arch-symbol of bourgeois revolution—the tricolor cockade. To them it signaled that “. . . the white slaves [of France] have killed their masters and [are] today free. . . .”⁵⁷ Why should black folk not follow their example, seize the land, govern themselves, and enjoy the fruits of their own labor? The *bossals* were the worst treated. It was folk wisdom of sorts among the planters that the *bossals* were “natural enemies” of slavery, itching for radical change.⁵⁸ While it is too much to say that the planters were in a rush to replace creoles with Africans as slave drivers, the slaveholders tried to balance the *bossal*-creole ratio in order to facilitate and speed up seasoning. However, their concern to raise the proportion of creole slaves in order to lessen the likelihood of rebellion sometimes escapes mention.

The slaves grew more adept also at articulating demands for partial concessions short of the outright abolition of slavery. They raised clever demands relating to the length of the work week, to working conditions, and to their own vital role in retail commerce. For example, in January 1791, parts of the South province faced a militant conspiracy for three free days a week.⁵⁹ In the spring of 1789, as noted above, the colonial government tried to impose a devaluated copper coinage on the colony. The scheme had to be abandoned when it faced the prospect of a boycott by slave retailers whose market produce fed the towns.⁶⁰

Circulating underground, abolitionist pamphlets from the *Amis des Noirs* added more heat. Even where direct access to the subversive literature was blocked, its contents nevertheless became known to slaves indirectly, usually from loose and careless talk between whites. Oppression sharpens the hearing, and the slaves overheard much of what their masters did not want them to hear.⁶¹

Nourished by the murmurings and discontent of mulattoes and free blacks, the great slave revolt of 1791 was thus preceded by a long spell of simmering agitation, a time of growing insolence, hateful glances, nervous tension, maroon activity, malingering, and every form of organized resistance from sabotage to arson. In whispers, the bondspeople assured one another that rescue was imminent; it would come either from the king or from the *Amis des Noirs*, or perhaps the two would join forces to strike off the chains. Exemplary acts of violence sowed unrest far and wide among the slaves and pressed fear deep in the heart of the slaveholders. “Everyone knows the trials and efforts which black slaves use, chiefly over the last thirty years, to shake off the yoke of servitude,” observed the Angers Society of Friends of the Constitution early in 1791. “Deserting in troops,” the Society noted, “they escape the plantations for mountains and forests as old as the world; there they are thus impervious to pursuit by their masters.”⁶² Tempered in decades of intense struggle and unimaginable suffering, a revolutionary consciousness among slaves not only existed, but by 1791 it was primed for any endeavor however desperate so long as it promised an end to slavery. When the slaves would finally budge, they would move with suddenness, and in the words of Aimé Césaire, with “impressive cohesion.”⁶³

Thus despite the surprise with which the uprising in August 1791 took the slaveholding class, private and public figures had long believed in a slave conspiracy and

in a coming insurrection. Permeating the thought of every slaveholder was the fear of being vastly outnumbered in surroundings where more and more slaves were gathering in dangerous-looking clusters, where ill-tempered meetings were multiplying beyond all control.

Often the fear had no tangible objects, nothing but rumors of unspecified seditious night gatherings in out-of-the-way places. For example, magistrates at the Cap were in a dither in the spring of 1786 about two wizards, one black, the other mulatto. They were credited with mysterious powers which enabled them to initiate slaves in visionary rites unknowable to whites.⁶⁴

The proposals actually put forward by the *Amis des Noirs* were half-measures really, timid and gradualistic.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the slaveholders were certain that the abolitionists were stirring an already boiling pot. They horrified planters with talk about slaves running free, forming mobs, with predictions about blacks robbing whites, escaping to live a life of vagabondage in the forests and on the mountains, wreaking personal revenge on whites for all the wrongs that they were suffering.⁶⁶ Even more scandalous in the slaveholder's eyes was an Enlightenment doctrine favoring amalgamation of the races. Condorcet and his *Amis des Noirs* colleagues saw emancipation as only the first step. Once slavery had ended, they looked to miscegenation to efface the physical differences between blacks and whites.⁶⁷ That prospect was anathema to the racists running St. Domingue.

Fear set the slaveholders in motion. In a classic plunge headlong toward disaster, *grand-blanc*-dominated provincial and colonial assemblies rebelled against royal functionaries, groundlessly accusing the latter of favoring abolition. In Cap François, the news of the storming of the Bastille, of the anti-feudal night of August 4, and of the Declaration of the Rights of Man was said to have "rekindled the imagination."⁶⁸ Concretely, the first scare deriving *directly* from the revolution in France materialized in the form of a letter received on August 12, 1789. It warned that secret shipments of arms were on the way to the blacks and mulattoes of St. Domingue.⁶⁹

There followed more of the same. Soon to be evicted from the colony as a consequence of the internecine struggle among the whites, intendant Barbé-Marbois was an unyielding enemy of emancipation. Cautioning against unspecified antislavery plots being woven by unnamed persons in Paris, he fretted about the frame of mind in Port-au-Prince, caused, he said, by the circulation of seditious printed matter. He was terrified that abolitionists had somehow slipped through the security shield and were stirring up the blacks.⁷⁰ In October 1789 the governor joined the intendant in raising a fuss about revolutionary pamphlets. Such writings were bound to sow discord among the slaves and incite unrest: "These books from Europe concerning liberty also circulate in St. Domingue despite the precautions that we have taken to stop them, and the free come together with the slaves on so many occasions it is impossible that they [slaves] should not have knowledge of the efforts made in their behalf."⁷¹ Now the abolitionists were even painting antislavery pictures on crockery!⁷² In the towns slaveholders grew wary of literate slaves who were too numerous for comfort. The situation was nowhere more tricky than in Cap François where in the last days of October rumors were "incensing the spirits" of "many educated Negroes."⁷³ District slaveholders spent one whole October night standing to arms on

the alert. They were responding to a false rumor that 20,000 blacks were descending from the mountains in a surprise assault, "but one got off with a good fright."⁷⁴

Stirrings were reported also in the south. However, as 1789 waned, it was in the north where the dread of slave rebellion was most imminent. As the hearsay circulated, it became more precise and vivid. The *Amis des Noirs*, according to one report, had already shipped in no less than 10,000 flintlocks and 5,000 pistols with which to arm the slaves against their owners: "these rumors spreading impudently enough through all the colony," reported the governor from Port-au-Prince, "have given rise successively in all regions to sudden and tumultuous assemblies which have produced the worst effects."⁷⁵ A correspondence committee seated in Cap François, the northern capital, took it upon itself to deliberately fan the panic. During the last two months of 1789 it copied and recopied an inflammatory letter warning of slave insurrection and spread the copies through the colony.⁷⁶ During the next year the paranoia did not change in essence, although it grew in manifestation. There was more talk about imprudent hands breaching the social dikes holding back the black torrent, more prattle about the flood of revenge and desolation that would bury alike foes and friends of the blacks in its wash. In January secret correspondence from the slaveholder deputies seated in the Constituent Assembly warned against the troops being sent from France. Many of them would be infected with the contagion of revolution and just might sympathize with the slaves and the mulattoes.⁷⁷ Somehow the northern provincial assembly formed the notion that La Luzerne, new minister of the Marine, was scheming to outlaw the importation of new slaves from Africa.⁷⁸

The more nervous slaveholders began to turn against members of their own class. The absentee owners actually owned the largest stake in the slave regime. Yet they were blamed for agitating the colony and for frightening the resident planters.⁷⁹ Absentee *colons* living in Paris were damned by islanders as being immoral, ill-behaved, and mired in debt. These magnates, men with slaveholdings said to be worth from 1,200,000 to 1,500,000 *livres*, were accused—not necessarily rationally—of fishing in troubled waters and of having a Catilinian aristocratic disdain for less wealthy slaveholders. True or untrue, the dispatches from Paris were incendiary and alarmist in tone, and were viewed as causing "devastation and carnage."

Behind every uproar the planters saw emancipation looming; everywhere hovered the ultimate menace of slave revolt. The general slave revolt ignited by Boukman at Limbé on August 21, 1791 was thus almost anticlimatic. For weeks prior, slaves at Croix des Bouquets, Cul-de-Sac, and Port-au-Prince, in the west, had been rising in arms. So did others at the Peinier and Chabaud plantations. The slaveholders' long dreamed nightmare had finally come true—field hands, domestics, trustees, coachmen, drivers, *commandeurs*, these and many others rose to burn the plantations and kill the slaveowners.

Looking back a couple of weeks after the August explosion, Dorothee Sartre, a white woman, tried to explain to herself what had made the black uprising possible. A typical member of a toppling ruling class, she was distraught. Like most of her class, racist mentality made her incapable of seeing that black slaves could be self-motivated and led by one of their own. The first scapegoat she came up with were the free mulattoes. The influence of the 1790 insurrection, combined with subse-

quent mulatto demands for active citizenship, had incited the blacks. Of course, in September 1791 the mulattoes had changed their mind and seen the light, ruminated Sartre, but by then it was too late. Next she began to suspect mysterious whites from France of pulling the strings.⁸⁰ Things would never be the same now that the slaves were up and shaking the heavens, and she like other slaveholders feared that the French government would assent to a decree ending slavery: "Reasonable people," she wrote, "in the meantime would like to better preserve their existence and property, but the fear of seeing a different decree which proclaims the emancipation of the negroes [sic] is that which is most disgusting."⁸¹

By the end of 1791 the initial wave of revolution had receded temporarily, being confined mainly to the north. However, most of the slaves in that region had thrown off the yoke forever. Slaveholders trembled at the thought that the next conflagration would engulf the West and South provinces where, in the words of Dorotheé Sartre, "our lives and properties are in the greatest danger because the mulattoes can at the first signal rouse all the negroes [sic]."⁸² The most critical situation was in the Port-au-Prince region. By September 1791, panic and "cruel agitations" gripped the entire ruling class, testified the distraught woman.⁸³

The emotion that was hope in the heart of the slave became fear in that of the slaveholder. And the panic spread among slaveholders by means of a similarly amorphous yet efficient mechanism. Like a contagion, fear of slave revolt spread, sparking chain-reaction happenings in specific locations over the two years from 1789 to 1791. In this, the panic in St. Domingue was similar to France's classic 1789 *Grand Peur*, chronicled by Georges Lefebvre.⁸⁴ Only here the affrighted were not bourgeois and peasants, but planters, and the ones feared were not "vagabonds" or *aristos*," but black slaves. The slaveholders convinced themselves that the danger was real. They told one another that the slaves were planning retribution, that timely measures were needed to anticipate the uprising, that surveillance had better focus on the troublemakers, and that the troublemakers were everyone, from mulattoes to free blacks, from *Amis des Noirs* to crown officials. They worried about former coachmen, about retired *commandeurs*, about house servants and sugar refiners, about anyone whom relative freedom of movement made a natural transmitter of news. Close watch was put on the mothers of numerous children and on elderly slaves too old to work. Custom had rendered blacks in these categories unofficial freedmen. Most of them continued to hang round the plantations where they had formerly been enslaved. Theirs was no more than a pauper's autonomy, as they tried to keep body and soul together from what could be scraped from miserable provisions plots. Nevertheless, remaining in close contact with their former workmates, the *de facto* freedmen and women were a vital link in the chain of communication which told blacks that their masters were terrified at the prospect of a slave revolt. Knowing that they were feared by their masters bolstered black self-confidence which, in turn, further fed the panic among slaveholders. Moreover, since St. Domingue's local markets were utterly dependent on black retailers for their supply of fruits and vegetables, there really was no way to dam the to-and-fro from town to plantation. But not only fruits and vegetables travelled to market; in the same basket went news, rumors, and gossip.

As for the *grands blancs*, they had institutionalized the mechanism for the generation of panic. The Provincial and Colonial Assemblies propagated the fear, establishing a network of correspondence committees, some in close contact with the Parisian Massiac Club reactionaries.

However, when all is said, perhaps the most effective of all the transmitters was the welter of urban slaves and semi-slaves whose labor was leased out by owners on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis against a fixed levy. These were craftsmen, skilled in one way or another, washerwomen and midwives, sailors and coasters, carpenters and smiths, fishermen and stevedores. They were prime news broadcasters, as were the itinerant peddlars who seemed to traipse about in great numbers. The more mobile the social elements in the colony, the more intensive the communications. Leslie Manigat has focused on the maroons, on voodoo as a political ideology, and on “creolization” of slaves from different ethnic backgrounds, as vital cogs in a communications network that helped propagate news of the panic.⁸⁵ Moreover, the forced repatriation to the colony of blacks who had been in France illegally infused some very dangerous purveyors of radical notions. That is why governor Chilleau was so angry when the talkative slave Georges Davies, a longtime resident of France, was dumped in his lap in March 1789.⁸⁶

One of the most powerful political-economic currents of the slaveholder psychosis was the planter’s transformation into a monomaniacal counter-revolutionary militant, intent solely on the bloody suppression of black insurgents. He was left with little or no time, and less opportunity, for the old business of exploiting slave labor power in the process of production—the sine qua non of the slaveholding class. Now absorbed in tending to weapons, chasing arms smugglers, standing guard, searching slave quarters, marching and countermarching, nocturnal patrolling and stuffing armories, slaveholders began to neglect the crops and the crafts.⁸⁷

In his *Reise in die Aequinoktial-Gegenden des neuen Kontinents*, Alexander von Humboldt wrote: “The seven united provinces of Venezuela have 60,000 slaves; Cuba, which is eight times smaller, has 212,000.”⁸⁸ Cuba was a near neighbor and could not escape the shock waves from the Haitian explosion.

The “trauma” had an impact on the policy of the Spanish authorities, on structural changes in Cuba’s economy, and on the notions of Havana’s creole oligarchy. It spurred efforts to preserve Cuba’s colonial status, expand its underdeveloped plantation economy in order to fill the gaping hole in the world sugar market, and eliminate French political and commercial competition from the region. Much of the action was taken against the background of the war of the first coalition against the French Republic (1793-1795).⁸⁹

Bending to the winds of change sweeping in across the Windward Passage, Cuba became a “test case” for a new form of political-economic collaboration between the Spanish colonial administration and the creole oligarchy. Recent historiography has shown that the sugar revolution, the growth of latifundism, and the rapprochement between expatriate colonial officials and creole oligarchs were already well underway by 1791.⁹⁰ Indeed, the 1792 census confirmed that there were already more nonwhites than whites in Cuba. Nevertheless, it seems that the influence of the black revolution in St. Domingue accelerated the restructuring of the Cuban economy, even though French hopes for continued sugar domination had not been fully

extinguished as our survey ends in 1795. The political upheaval created a tremendous intellectual challenge for Cuban slaveholders. It was during the last decade of the eighteenth century that the first generation of Cuban planter ideologues grew to maturity.

Tremors from the epicenter in the neighboring island hit Cuba quickly and directly. The slave revolution stirred waves of fear which spread in concentric circles through the entire plantation zone from Brazil to Virginia. As it turned out, the danger was minimal for Cuba, but the economic impulse was substantial for the traditional cattle-breeding colony. Both the colonial authorities and the planter ideologists knew this but pretended that the peril was real. The concatenation of measures for internal defense, maneuvers to strengthen Cuba's position in the Caribbean, and the legacy of the enlightened reforms of Spanish King Charles III (1759-1788) resulted in an acceleration in the development of the plantation society. Nevertheless, it proved difficult to find a balance between checking the influence of the slave revolution and French revolutionary thought, on one side, and catering to the interests of the crown and the rising planter oligarchy, on the other. The tightrope act led to dubious gambits, including temporary support for the slave revolution, alliance during the war of the first coalition with the erstwhile main colonial rival, Great Britain, internment of fugitive French slaveholders, snipings at the English ally, and sneaky negotiations with the commissioners representing the enemy French Convention. Cynically, the fear was manipulated in the interests of the planter oligarchy. As the import of black slaves spurred, the "Haiti trauma" was eclipsed in the mind of most of Cuba's white inhabitants by terrifying reports from France itself.⁹¹ Sermons against "heretical regicides" raised shivers about "Revolution." Scare stories about "black brutality" and the danger of *Negrocracia* (black rule) also struck responsive chords in the colonial mentality.

The Cuban "trauma" had its own chronology. At first, the Convention's commissioners and the rebellion of the free mulattoes in St. Domingue were regarded as the chief threat. From 1790 to 1804, St. Domingue was the "France" of the Caribbean to everyone in the region. To contain and nullify this radical "French" influence was a main concern during the initial stages. With this in mind, Cuban authorities tried covert action with *grands blancs* and royalists from St. Domingue, with Englishmen, with Spaniards from the mother country and, for the time being, even with rebel slaves. The "fear complex" thus served initially to shield Cuba from foreign contagion and maintain "good order" within.

Suddenly in 1789-1790, bizarre news began to arrive in Cuba concerning events in France and its colonies. The Captain-General's correspondence with the Spanish prime minister, Count Floridablanca, reflects a growing new concern—to prevent the distribution in the island of printed material (still mostly English) and to protect the area of command against the French and other foreigners:⁹² "Prevent any importation in the territory under your command of news about what is taking place in the islands and in the kingdom of France, thereby [care should be taken] that those [accounts] which can be spread in written form, are withdrawn [from circulation]. . . . [I]n general [dangerous ideas are the ones] the deceitful and seductive French have spread and are spreading."⁹³ On November 17, 1789, all foreigners were summoned to quit Havana within a month.⁹⁴ On September 7, 1791, the governor of

Santiago de Cuba forwarded an alarm from Baracca, the easternmost town in Cuba, concerning the uprising “of the Negro slaves in . . . French part [of Hispaniola], led by mulattoes and some whites.”⁹⁵ Evoking the dread “force of bad example,” the governor referred to the call for help issued by his French counterpart, Blanchelande. Soon Lliepart, a direct emissary from Blanchelande, appeared in Havana, carrying a secret report for Captain-General Don Luis de las Casas: “All the Negroes of the northern part of the French island rose up on the 22nd of [August], with the potential that the rebellion could be general in the whole [island].”⁹⁶ Afrighted that the insurrection would spread, the authors of the report claimed that the blacks had attacked and burned houses and villages, and had killed every white settler who had not escaped to the Cap. The report was enough to strike terror in the hearts of Cuban slaveholders.

Thus the call for protection rang out, troops were demanded, and terror mushroomed. From Baracca came the rumor that the rebel slaves were being armed by mulattoes who had been trained in the St. Domingue militia. The latter had persuaded the insurgents, it was said, to expect no sympathy from any white power and thus to either fight to the death or create an impregnable stronghold. The Baraccan authorities feared an imminent invasion along the coast. Echoing the tone of nearly all Cuban official documents, the rebels were described as “the general enemies of all men, barbarians, brutal and bloodthirsty, and without the moderation of civilized nations.”⁹⁷

The royal colonial administration neither wished nor was able to grant French requests for meat, weapons, and ammunition. Officially, Spain adopted a “policy of neutrality.” Unofficially, runaway slaves from across the border in Hispaniola were sheltered on the Spanish side.

From the autumn of 1791 on, a growing number of French refugees from St. Domingue sought to immigrate to Cuba. Called upon for a ruling, Floridablanca laid down the law to all the viceroys and governors in Spain’s American colonies:

That your Honors and other principals should take as the rule and instruction not to interfere in order not to support any of the factions [in St. Domingue] . . . more than the others, so that in this point a perfect neutrality be observed. However, should groups of evildoers, sea pirates, or Negroes against whites be formed to destroy the latter, or to commit atrocities or plunder, you should try to act . . . so that the persecuted shall be provided with provisions, weapons and munitions to the best of one’s ability, as well as with demonstration[s] of land and sea power . . . [C]are should be taken that contact with the insurrection should not spread to Spanish parts and possessions.⁹⁸

From this “cordon sanitaire” neutrality sprang a two-pronged undertaking: (1) a policy of containment aimed at isolating the insurrection, allowing as need arose for aid to French royalists against rebel slaves, and (2) a policy of inoculating Spanish territories against the germ of slave rebellion, nevertheless encompassing a *Realpolitik* which armed fleeing French-owned slaves and sent them into action against Republican mulattoes and *petits blancs*.

The regicide in France and the exigencies of the war shattered traditional procedures. Both sides—the Spaniards as well as the French commissioners Sonthonax and Polverel—armed slaves. Seeking salvation in boldness, Sonthonax proclaimed the abolition of slavery on August 29, 1793, throwing the French royalists into the

embrace of the British expeditionary force, which invaded Jérémie on St. Domingue's southern peninsula from Jamaica in September.

Spies kept the Cubans posted. An espionage report from Kingston advised that the war in Europe would soon force the French to withdraw most of their troops from St. Domingue, leaving the white colonists to depend on American food provisions.⁹⁹ The French colonial empire was paralyzed: "The French colony continues in insurrection and is on the verge of being handed over to the English . . . but it is determined to defend itself against the Spanish if these too should seek to invade."¹⁰⁰

Desombregé and other royalists from St. Domingue urged the Cubans to intervene. The transcript of his interrogation exemplifies the reactionary pigheadedness and racial hatred of his class:

[St. Domingue's] inhabitants think their absolute ruin almost certain if no foreign power comes to support them. This colony lives under the power of two civilian commissioners, who, it is said, have taken an oath to first exterminate all white inhabitants . . . to place it completely under the domination of the free Colored to proclaim general freedom for Negro slaves. . . . The hope of the colonists is directed toward Spain and England: they summon the former [power] with troops from Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Puerto de Plata . . . [F]or this reason the settlers believe that Spain will occupy the colony and await with longing the appearance of his Catholic Majesty's Armada.¹⁰¹

Among the conditions under which French slaveholders would accept Spanish sovereignty were the following:

First, a sure and efficient protection in order to destroy the rebellious blacks. Second, to restore good order. Third, to restore the subjects' property. Fourth, that the [colonists] should retain moveable and immovable property in the same condition in which it had been before the Revolution. Fifth, that black slavery will exist precisely as before said Revolution, with the promise from his Catholic Majesty not to alter anything in the substance and French jurisdiction of [St.] Domingue.¹⁰²

All other laws and economic regulations were to remain as before January 1, 1785. Special regulations were to be drawn up to control free coloreds. However, on November 8, 1793, Havana announced that it had learned that French royalists planned to surrender St. Domingue to the English.¹⁰³ In 1796 British general Williamson, occupying Port-au-Prince, dispatched one Chevalier de Kerenscoff to Santiago de Cuba to procure 200 bloodhounds trained by Cuban experts to hunt down blacks. After a run around, he was refused because by that time Great Britain was no longer the ally of Spain.¹⁰⁴

In 1794 French republican units under Laveaux were close to total defeat. At long last, on February 4, 1794, the Convention decreed the abolition of slavery throughout the French empire. In May, Toussaint Louverture went over to the side of the Republic, taking with him disciplined black regiments which had been outfitted by the Spaniards. In short order, he chased the royalists, drove out the Spanish, and forced the English to retreat. In July 1795, Spain and France signed the Peace of Basel, according to which treaty Spain surrendered the entire island of Hispaniola to the French.

This callous-seeming subordination of the interests of the white colonial population to European power politics scratched away at the minds of the colonists—after all, the town of Santo Domingo, relinquished to the French, had been the oldest Spanish settlement in the entire western hemisphere. Nevertheless, Cuba's main goal seemed assured—its chief competitor in the sugar industry lay prostrate. Its economic prospects brightening, Havana quickly became the new de facto center of the Spanish Caribbean.¹⁰⁵

Cuban officialdom moved to further immunize its territory from the contagion of slave revolution. Regulations prescribed controls for any slaves who had had contact with the insurgents in St. Domingue.¹⁰⁶ A renewed decree forbade the use on any plantation of blacks from that island.¹⁰⁷ French refugees fleeing St. Domingue were not allowed to land their slaves on Cuban soil. The latter had to be left behind or dumped in Porto Pello or, better yet, sold to the British in Honduras.¹⁰⁸ These exclusions caused controversy, however, because they contradicted the labor-power demands of sugar production. The demand for black slaves from any source, including from St. Domingue, grew explosively. The “new system of discipline”¹⁰⁹ required to further the leap to a plantation system based on mass slavery could crystallize only in step with the growth of the *Ingenio* (“slave manufacture”) and large-scale importation of African bondsmen. Hence the constant misgivings of the colonial authorities, as their regulations against the introduction of potentially seditious blacks were ignored by labor-hungry sugar planters¹¹⁰—the powerful “*grupo de presión de los hacendados habaneros*.” From its Havana region nursery, plantation slavery spread through western Cuba. Meanwhile, the slaveholder paranoia, known as the “*Guarico phantasma*” to Cubans, fogged the social atmosphere, conditioning the class struggle and sublimating the nightmares of the ruling elite in the form of the spectre of the rebel slave.

Thus the years 1792-1795, when the Haitian connection was at its most nerve-racking for Cuban slaveholders, were decisive for Cuba's development as a plantation colony. These years came to be known as the first time of the “fat cows,” as periodic sugar booms were henceforth to be termed. The Spanish authorities stationed on the island succeeded in channelling the political impulse of the St. Domingue slave revolution into economic growth and structural reforms. In turn, the creole planters felt a renewed need for the protection of the Spanish colonial power. The possibility seemed good that Havana could become the center of a West Indian-North American plantation empire. The huge virgin North American market, and the roisterous commercial enterprise of the U.S. bourgeoisie, bolstered such notions. Nevertheless, this optimism did not blind the ideologists of the slave regime to the continued danger of uprisings. One of them reformulated the apprehension according to the new conditions, writing: “I think that it is not the introduction of slaves [which causes the danger], but rather their poor distribution.”¹¹¹

In summation, the victorious Black Revolution in St. Domingue caused slave rebellion to be regarded as a kind of fatality, particularly by those who most dreaded its approach. Rooted ultimately in the economic exploitation and social, political, and ideological oppression of the black masses, the great dread was bound to affect the rest of the Caribbean, particularly Cuba, if only because of the presence of a trans-Caribbean black sensibility.

NOTES

¹ *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; rpt., New York, 1969), pp. 18-52; a recent dissertation is J. S. Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (Duke University, 1987).

² Archives Nationales de France, Fond des Colonies antérieures à 1815—hereafter AN (Col.)—DXXV - 3 - Comité des Colonies - Proclamation de Roi sur un Decret de l'Assemblée Nationale concernant l'île de Saint Domingue du 9 avril 1790 suit le decret l'Assemblée Nationale, du 28 mars 1790.

³ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, ed. Maurel et Taillemite, 3 vols. (Paris 1958), Vol. I, *passim*; see also G. Debien, *Les Esclaves aux Antilles Françaises (XVII-XVIII siècles)* (Basse-Terre Guadeloupe and Fort de France Martinique, 1971).

⁴ Aimé Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture. La Révolution Française et le Problème Colonial* (1961; Lrpt. Paris, 1981, pp. 21-11.

⁵ *Traité d'économie politique et de commerce des colonies*, 2 Vols. (Paris, 1801).

⁶ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-21 May 1789.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See A. Soboul, *Paysans, Sans-Culottes et Jacobins* (Paris, 1966), pp. 13-97; *La France à la Veille de la Révolution: Economie et Société*, 2^e edition, revue et augmentée (Paris, 1974), pp. 220-63; and *Les Campagnes Montpelliéraines à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime: Propriété et Cultures d'après les Compoix* (Paris, 1958); see also G. Lefebvre, *Questions Agraires au Temps de la Terreur* (Paris, 1954); and P. de Saint-Jacob, *Documents Relatifs à la Communauté Villageoise en Bourgogne du Milieu de XVII^e Siècle à la Révolution* (Paris, 1962).

⁹ J.A.N. de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Reflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres. Par M. Schwartz, Pasteur du Saint Evangile à Bienna, membre de la Société économique de B+++*, Nouvelle édition revue & corrigée (Neufchatel et Paris, 1788), in *La Révolution Française et l'Abolition de L'Esclavage* (hereafter *RFAE*) (Paris, EDHIS, 1968), VI, 21-22.

¹⁰ Compare Carolyn Flick, "Black Peasants and Soldiers in the Saint-Domingue Revolution: Initial Reactions to Freedom in the South Province (1793-4)," in F. Frantz, ed., *History From Below: Studies in Popular Protest in Honour of George Rude* (Montreal, 1985), p. 255.

¹¹ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-12 August 1789.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ AN (Col.) C⁹A-163-11 May 1789.

¹⁴ AN (Col.) C⁹A-163-23 April 1789.

¹⁵ *Réimpression de L'Ancien Moniteur. Seule Histoire Authentique et Inalterée de la Révolution Française Depuis La Réunion des Etats-Généraux Jusqu'au Consulat (mai 1789 - novembre 1799)*, 32 vols., Paris, 1858 (hereafter *Moniteur*), I, 104-05.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 381.

¹⁷ *Lettre à Mm. les Députés des Trois Ordres, pour les engager à faire nommer par les Etats-Généraux, à l'exemple des Anglois, une Commission chargée d'examiner la cause des Noirs*, Paris, May 1789, in *RFAE*, VII, 28.

¹⁸ Preface de C.-A. Julien, in A. Césaire, p. 111.

¹⁹ *Moniteur*, VI, 472.

²⁰ S. Alexis, *Black Liberator: The Life of Toussaint Louverture*, trans. from the French by W. Stirling (New York, 1949), p. 23.

²¹ *Lettre à Mm. des Députés des Trois Ordres, pour les engager à faire nommer par les Etats-Généraux, à l'exemple des Anglois, une Commission chargée d'examiner la cause des Noirs*, pp. 43-44.

²² G. Debien, "Les colons des Antilles et leur main d'oeuvre à la fin de XVIII^e siècle," in *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1955), XXVII 272 (hereafter *AHRF*).

²³ *Discours sur la nécessité d'établir à Paris pour concourir, avec celle de Londres, à l'abolition de la traite & de l'esclavage des Negres. Prononcé le 19 février 1788, dans une Société de quelques amis, rassemblés à Paris, à la prière du Comité de Londres* (Paris, 1788). in *RFAE*, VI, 16.

²⁴ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-1 April 1789.

²⁵ AN (Col.) C⁹A-163-28, March 1789.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1789.

²⁷ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162 10, April 1789.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, August 15, 1789

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Moniteur*, Vol. 3, Extrait d'une lettre de St. Domingue de 5 novembre 1789.

³¹ Debien, "Les colons des Antilles", pp. 264-65.

³² AN (Col.) C⁹A-165-2, March 1786.

³³ *Ibid.*, March 8, 1786.

³⁴ J. M. C. Américain, *Sang-Mèlé, Précis des Gémissements des Sang-mèlés dans les Colonies Françaises* (Paris, 1789), in *RFAE*, XI, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ AN (Col.) C⁹A-163-16, June 1789.

³⁷ AN (Col.) C⁹A-165-18, January 1786.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; In the 1560s French slavers began to deposit black people on French soil for the first time. The presence of Africans created a legal problem in sixteenth-century France, for as converts to Christianity their continued status as slaves became questionable, and the laws of the kingdom had not yet been tailored to fit the wholesale commercial enslavement of Africans. In February 1576, the *Parlement* of Guyenne, adopting the formula that "France, mother of liberty, suffers no slaves," ordered the immediate emancipation of Africans being sold at Bordeaux market. This judgement, if applied at face value, would have prohibited African slavery *within* France itself. In 1636 King Louis XIII explicitly accepted the principle of black slavery in the overseas colonies but did not repeal the 1576 decision governing mainland France. Modified, ignored, watered down, the free soil principle ostensibly remained on the books until the 1780s.

³⁹ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-28, July 1789.

⁴⁰ L. F. Manigat, "The Relationship between Marronage and Slave Revolts and Revolution in St. Domingue-Haiti", in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences (New York, 1977), CCXCII, 427.

⁴¹ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-10, October 1789.

⁴² Letter of La Société des Amis de la Constitution d'Angers, in *RFAE*, IX, 172.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ AN (Col.) C⁹A-165-1, June 1786.

⁴⁵ Richard, "Les minutes des notaires de Saint-Domingue aux archives du ministère de la France d'Outre-mer", in *Revue d'histoire des colonies* (Paris, 1951).

⁴⁶ AN (Col.) C⁹A-165-22, March 1786.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, April 6, 1786.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1786.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, May 29, 1786.

⁵⁰ J.M.C. Américain, in *RFAE*, Vol. XI, p. 4.

⁵¹ *Moniteur*, X, 593-94.

⁵² J. Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death* (New York, 1981), p. 339.

⁵³ Adresse a l'Assemblée Nationale, pour l'abolition de la Traite des Noirs, Par la Société des Amis des Noirs de Paris, 5 février 1790, in *RFAE*, VII, 19.

⁵⁴ *Moniteur*, III, 296.

⁵⁵ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-23, October 1789.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, December 1, 1789.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, October 10, 1789.

⁵⁸ *Lettre à Mm. les Députés des Trois Ordres, pour les engager à faire nommer par les Etats-Généraux, a l'exemple des Anglais, une Commission chargée d'examiner la cause des Noirs*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ C. Flick, p. 256.

⁶⁰ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-21, May 1789.

⁶¹ T.O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville, 1973), pp. 40-41.

⁶² Letter of La Société des Amis de la Constitution d'Angers, in *RFAE*, IX, 172.

⁶³ A. Césaire, p. 191.

⁶⁴ Moreau de Saint-Méry, I, 275.

⁶⁵ J.A.N. de Caritat, p. 24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶⁸ AN (Col.) C⁹A-163-24, September 1789.

⁶⁹ J. Saintoyant, *La Colonisation Française pendant la Révolution (1789-1799)*, Vol. I: *Les Assemblées Révolutionnaires et les Colonies* (Paris, 1930), pp. 119-20.

⁷⁰ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-25, September 1789.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, October 10, 1789.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, October 24, 1789.

⁷⁴ *Moniteur*, III, 296.

⁷⁵ AN (Col.) C⁹A-163-12, November 1789.

⁷⁶ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-1, December 1789.

⁷⁷ *Correspondance secrette* (Paris, 1789), in *RFAE*, VIII, 19.

⁷⁸ *Moniteur*, V, 562.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 381.

⁸⁰ G. Debien, "Documents—Nouvelles de Saint-Domingue, Première assemblée coloniale (avril-août 1790), Soulèvement des gens de couleur (août-octobre 1791)," in *AHRF*, 32 (1960), 190, 191.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁸³ G. Debien, "Les Colons des Antilles," p. 272.

⁸⁴ George Rudé, "Introduction," in G. Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, English Translation (London, 1973), p. xi.

⁸⁵ "The Relationship between Maroonage and Slave Revolts and Revolution in St. Domingue-Haiti," p. 421.

⁸⁶ AN (Col.) C⁹A-162-9, March 1789.

⁸⁷ M. Schuler, "Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas," in *Journal of Social History*, No. 3, 1970.

⁸⁸ A. von Humboldt, *Reise in Aequinoktial-Gegenden des neuen Kontinents*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Stuttgart, 1899), Vol. 6, Reise II, pp. 99ff.

⁸⁹ J. Hall, "Essay uber die Entwicklung der Plantagenwirtschaft auf der Insel Kuba (1800-1898)," in *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1971, Part I, pp. 275ff., and E. Torres-Cuevas, *Cuba y Haiti: una coyuntura y dos opciones* (Havana 1985), (manuscript).

⁹⁰ Michael Zeuske, "Kolonialpolitik und Revolution: Kuba und die Unabhängigkeit der Costa Firme, 1808-1820. Zu einem Forschungsfeld der vergleichenden Revolutionsgeschichte," in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1989, Heft 5, pp. 407-26. Max Zeuske, "La sacarocracia cubana y los inicios del ciclo revolucionario burgues en España. El papel de Francisco Arango y Parreno," in A. Gil Novales, ed., *La revolución burgues en España* (Madrid, 1985), pp. 277ff.; M. Moreno Fraginals, *El Ingenio. Complejo economico social cubano del azucar*, 3 volumes (Havana, 1978), I, 105ff; Levi Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y Sociedad*, vols. VI-XIII (Madrid, 1978-1987). K. Kiple, *Blacks in Colonial Cuba, 1774-1899* (Gainesville, 1976); A. J. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815: Crown, Military and Society* (Knoxville, 1986); F. Knight, "Origins of wealth and the sugar revolution in Cuba, 1750-1850," in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 57, 1977, pp. 231-253; Pablo Tornero, "Emigración, población y esclavitud en Cuba, 1765-1817," in *Anuario De Estudios Americanos*, 1987, pp. 229-80; J. I. Domínguez, *Insurrection or Loyalty: The Breakdown of the Spanish American Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980).

⁹¹ J. L. Franco, *Comercio clandestine de esclaves* (Havana, 1980), pp. 89ff.

⁹² Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Correspondencia de los Capitanes Generales legajo 41, numero 1 (hereafter ANC, CCG, leg.).

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ ANC, Asuntos Political [hereafter AF], leg. 297, no. 10.

⁹⁵ ANC, AP, leg. 4, no. 35.

⁹⁶ ANC, AP, leg. 4, no. 33.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ ANC, CCG, leg. 7, no. 7.

⁹⁹ ANC, CCG, leg. 44, no. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; W. Markov, *Revolution im Zeugenstand, 1789-1799*, 2 volumes, Leipzig, 1982, Vol. I, pp. 183 and 401; and J. Bruhat, "Maximilien Robespierre und die Kolonialprobleme," in W. Markov, ed., *Maximilien Robespierre, 1758-1794* (Berlin, 1961), pp. 67ff.

¹⁰¹ ANC, CCG, leg. 44, no. 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ J. L. Franco, *Revoluciones y conflictos internacionales en el Caribe, 1789-1854* (Havana, 1965), pp. 29ff.

¹⁰⁴ ANC, CCG, leg. 49, no. 3.

¹⁰⁵ J. R. McNeill, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill, 1985).

¹⁰⁶ ANC, AP, leg. 4, no. 44.

¹⁰⁷ ANC, CCG, leg. 46, nos. 1-3.

¹⁰⁸ ANC, CCG, leg. 46, no. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Moreno Fraginals, Vol. I, p. 63.

¹¹⁰ ANC, AP, leg. 6, nos. 28-30.

¹¹¹ ANC, Real Consulado, leg. 74, No. 2836.