

Editors' Introduction

Haitian Lives/Global Perspectives

Haitian artists Vladimir Cybil Charlier and Andre Juste created the artwork that graces the cover of this issue. Entitled *Brooklyn*, the painting is part of a collaborative series, *The Politics of Paradise*, which focuses on Haitian and, by extension, Caribbean and black diasporic culture and history, seen primarily through the prism of the familiar, fantastical art of Haiti. The series examines exploitative marketing practices associated with Caribbean art. To show the relationship of the art industry to inexpensive cultural labor, Charlier and Juste depict tediously hand-painted bolts of canvas that could be marketed and sold “by the yard” and rolls of paper towel adorned with iconic “naive” paintings and patterns of tropical vignettes. Charlier was born in Queens, New York, but grew up in Haiti; Juste was born and raised in Haiti, settling in New York in 1989. Both artists believe their trajectories of emigration and return home, their existences in at least two worlds, fundamentally have shaped their worldviews, captured poignantly by Charlier: “When one inhabits two worlds, one often simultaneously belongs to both and none.”¹ For us, their work perfectly captured the themes of this issue and our desire to place Haitian perspectives at the center of inquiry in the wake of the global response to the devastating 2010 earthquake.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster that leveled Haiti’s capital city and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, the Caribbean republic reentered mass public consciousness. While plate tectonics were to blame for the earthquake itself, commentators from across the political spectrum attributed the vast scale of this “unnatural disaster” in the “poorest country in the West” to a variety of human factors, most notably to foreign interference, administrative misappropriation, and Haitians’ general incapacity for self-rule. Academics participated in the collective

Radical History Review

Issue 115 (Winter 2013) DOI 10.1215/01636545-1724679

© 2013 by MARHO: The Radical Historians’ Organization, Inc.

hand-wringing, as scholarly listservs and online discussion boards revisited the decades-long inquiry into Haiti's stunning absence from the teaching of history just about everywhere except in Haiti itself. Some even remembered that the Haitian Revolution of 1792 to 1804—the only successful slave revolution in modern history, which created the first black republic anywhere—was a world-historical event with global effects that remain to this day. For more than two hundred years, in fact, “Haiti” has both fueled forms of state-sponsored economic and antiblack policies (including intensified oppression of enslaved people, economic embargo, genocide, immigration quotas, and deportations) and inspired Pan-Africanist political mobilization and African diaspora cultural production. It has played a central role in organizing historical knowledge about the Caribbean, the so-called First and Third Worlds, and the West. And it is among the most widely touted cases of anticolonial activism in the Americas region even as Haitian postcolonialism has been more presumed than studied. This issue of *Radical History Review* strives to maintain and extend the discussion of Haitian history rekindled by the earthquake, and to highlight recent research that helps us understand Haiti as an indispensable part of world history.

As several of the essays in this issue explain, in the years since Michel-Rolph Trouillot famously showed that the Haitian Revolution was “unthinkable” and its history relegated to silence, the country's history has gone from “hidden” and “unknowable” to widely studied in the United States and beyond.² The 2010 earthquake did stimulate a burst of interest in Haiti and its past among both scholars and the general public abroad. As sudden as this awakening may have seemed, however, to understand Haiti better people looked to a body of research, writing, and reflection by Haiti specialists that had been decades in the making. Yet, a great deal of misinformation, and in fact disinformation, persists alongside Haiti's new cachet, and the perspectives of Haitians themselves are chronically absent from the discussion.

The essays that make up the “Interventions” and “Teaching Radical History” sections opening this issue lay stereotypes and misinformation about Haiti against the possibility of leveraging not only its past but indeed the very fact of its perceived incomprehensibility to awaken understanding about the Haitian people, the Haitian nation, and its world-historical importance. These essays set out not just to debunk myths, but indeed to make the “unthinkable” nature of Haitian history an important part of their analyses. Through a roundtable discussion, a conference report, and a teaching reflection, the scholar-activists based in Haiti and outside it whose work appears in this section have intervened in and tried to shape public debates. First, in a public conversation that took place in March 2012, convened and moderated by Gary Wilder, Laurent Dubois and Greg Grandin reflect on Haitian and Latin American history and how they each have parlayed frustrations into opportunities for public education. After a career spent studying Haitian history, the US-based historian Laurent Dubois was moved to write a new book that brings

the least-studied period of Haitian history into focus: the stretch of time between the revolution and US military occupation in the early twentieth century. In dialogue with Haitian intellectuals throughout his study, Dubois brings to the fore the crucial idea of the “counter-plantation” as a concept for understanding Haiti’s century of postindependence nation building. In turning away from the conventional assessment of “failure” when observing Haitians’ refusal to return to the plantation complex following the revolution, Dubois heeds the call recently made by the literary scholar Deborah Jensen, who implicitly inverted the typical interpretation of Haiti’s historical trajectory as a betrayal of its revolutionary ideals. Jensen writes, “The quest to imagine what 1804 might have become is a minute failure to imagine what 1804 actually was, not philosophically or politically but anthropologically and sociologically.”³ Greg Grandin, a historian of Latin America, likewise insists that the conventional way of understanding the politics, culture, and history of the region has systematically obscured its contributions to the world’s conceptions of justice and rights. In the course of their unscripted exchange, Wilder, Dubois, and Grandin emphasize the importance of public history and of making it a part of what professional historians do.

The next contribution to this issue also reflects on the possibilities of activist scholarship. In translating a series of live events into an essay on the challenges and benefits of applying the transnational paradigm, the essay’s authors demonstrate the need for a more just and inclusive way of conducting scholarly work. Following the mass exodus of Haitians and Dominicans to the United States and other parts of the world since the 1960s, scholars have been pushed to rethink immigration studies and processes of globalization and political economy and to understand precisely how Haitians and Dominicans are protagonists of transnationalism and “imagined community.” In “Transnational Hispaniola: Toward New Paradigms in Haitian and Dominican Studies,” authors Mayes, Martín, Decena, Jayaram, and Alexis—a collective of artists, activists, and scholars of the two nations that share the island of Hispaniola—discuss the daunting challenges before them as they work to reframe scholarly and activist debates on Haitian and Dominican knowledge production and pedagogy. Current paradigms, they argue, too often render as normative Haitian-Dominican class exploitation, gender violence, social exclusion, and xenophobia on the basis of citizenship, sexuality, language, culture, and phenotype. The collective’s conference report shows that both pervasive social beliefs (including male supremacy and in the case of the Dominican Republic, anti-Haitianism) and everyday circumstances (most notably the devastation and ongoing recovery efforts of Haitians following the earthquake) continue to create obstacles to full participation by women, Haitian, and African-descended scholars and activists in the progressive conversations generated by “Transnational Hispaniola.” Their transnational frame, then, underscores for them that theory follows practice. This collective is committed to shifting debates even though this means grappling with the challenges and com-

plex circumstances produced by the physical act of bringing Haitian and Dominican activists, intellectuals, and artists into the same conversation. They will continue their work at the third Transnational Hispaniola conference (THIII), slated to be held in Haiti in 2014.

In this issue's "Teaching Radical History" essay, Simon R. Doubleday describes how—in the wake of the earthquake—he left the comfort of his scholarly field of medieval Spain to teach an online summer course geared to the excavation of historical knowledge that might help in understanding Haiti after the disaster. In doing so, he unseats stereotypes held by more than a few of his students and prompts all historians to attend to dialogues with the present no matter their field of inquiry.

The "Features" section begins with a set of two research articles that do not treat the Haitian Revolution itself directly, but rather contribute illuminating, original insights on what came just before and just after it. In "A Colonial Cul de Sac: Plantation Life in Wartime Saint-Domingue, 1775–1782," Paul Cheney innovatively brings the internal life of a plantation in colonial Saint-Domingue out of the background of history. Cheney exploits a singularly rich cache of business and personal documents left by a Breton nobleman whose abrupt flight from France after the 1791 Revolution allowed the government to seize and archive it. Drawing on these documents, Cheney offers a minute reconstruction of the daily life and finances of a large plantation whose work was carried out by approximately two hundred slaves, as seen through the eyes of the *gérant*, the resident manager who authored a prolific stream of mail to the plantation owner back in France. These documents reveal a ground-up perspective on the simultaneous wealth and fragility of the plantation, and the colony's insertion in the broader, trans-Atlantic plantation complex in this century of intermittent warfare. Cheney examines the elite family's wartime adaptations and shows that, even before the Haitian Revolution, the plantation was fragile and readily "decomposed" in the face of warfare. This research interestingly seems to foreshadow some of the recurring themes that other essays in this issue develop: notably, the importance of debt in creating perennial economic fragility; and the interesting irony of hunger and scarcity experienced by inhabitants of a place that is so rich in agricultural resources. The glimpse of a plantation owner's acute concern over his slave management strategies in the wake of wartime scarcity that these documents afford us makes us wonder how those who were enslaved experienced it, a dimension of this story that stands explicitly outside the scope of Cheney's research. One can only imagine both the true human cost, and the compensatory strategies, of this scarcity among the most socially vulnerable. Of particular, if implicit, importance here is the tension between the supposed isolation of Saint-Domingue/Haiti and its deep integration into the world system. Both the plantation's (cultural and geographic) distance from the metropole and its deep connectedness to world events become apparent in the details of quotidian life that these documents reveal. Cheney's research contributes to historical knowledge about the connection of the

Haitian Revolution to the other Atlantic revolutions—this time, from the planters' point of view. This history of an elite family in colonial Saint-Domingue also deepens our understanding of independent Haiti's radical refusal to participate in the oppressive colonial economy; one can fathom the importance of the "counter-plantation" only once we understand the plantation, itself.

In her article, "To Live and Die, Free and French: Toussaint Louverture's 1801 Constitution and the Original Challenge of Black Citizenship," Lorelle D. Semley takes a sustained look at a critical moment in Haiti's history after the outbreak of the revolution but before it ended in independence. Closely reading the provisions involving citizenship rights, inclusion/exclusion, servitude, and family in the succession of laws and Saint-Domingue's fascinating "colonial" Constitution of 1801 against the broader political, legal, and social history of the opening years of Haiti's independence struggle, Semley reconstructs from the Caribbean perspective how the new French republic struggled over the question of how to incorporate black colonists, especially those who had been formerly enslaved. In the course of her analysis, Semley inquires into the relationship of formal emancipation to the enslaveds' actions in favor of their own freedom, as seen through Louverture's vision of a "colony of black citizens within the French empire."

Initial legal changes after the French Revolution neither enacted general emancipation nor explicitly mentioned race or slavery. In short, Semley explains, in the new French republic, constitutional provisions "captured neither the circumstances of enslavement in the Caribbean with black women and men held in chattel slavery and sold by their owners, nor the nature of emancipation, unfolding in Saint-Domingue, coming as it did with restrictions." By contrast, Louverture's 1801 Constitution established freedom as a birthright, not a condition bestowed by the state that the state could then withdraw or limit. As Louverture reached the apex of his power before his death in 1803, Semley perceptively points out that it was not just his growing authoritarianism and militarism but his apparent vulnerability that drove his policy decisions. In his constant struggle for "order, productivity, and freedom," Semley explains, Louverture proceeded "as though liberty itself depended on morality." The theme of morality frequently came to rest on questions of family and, more broadly, gender. The author demonstrates how the two characteristics of Louverture's leadership—on the one hand his militarism and on the other the "image of the family"—were essentially two sides of same coin. And in the foundational documents of the territory that would soon be Haiti, his approach to constitutionalism took the plantation as the center of economic and social life, implementing provisions that constructed the colony's polity "in terms of family, morality, and the duties of citizenship." Although many scholars emphasize rupture and discontinuity between Louverture's 1801 Constitution and the legislation that came under his successor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Semley argues forcefully for a subtly different view. Louverture's constitutional provisions involving "citizenship,

marriage, the family, and production” were taken up subsequently (although not together) in future laws. The author ends by considering later French colonialism in Africa, connecting her research into the crucial moment of transition from Saint-Domingue to Haiti to a broader history that “exposes the origins of a fundamental tension between the history of empire and the rhetoric of citizenship in France.” Echoing statements that both Grandin and Dubois made in their earlier discussion, Semley turns away from facile dismissals of the hypocrisy of the betrayal of eighteenth-century revolutionary ideals, instead calling upon readers to consider recentering debates about human rights in “colonial outposts” in Africa and Haiti. While not denying the paradoxes in the idealistic republics brought about by the Atlantic Revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Semley argues “that the earlier false starts and current contradictions are part and parcel of a broad conceptualization of human rights that, tellingly, emerged during an era of slavery and empire.”

Echoing Dubois, Grandin, and Wilder’s earlier discussion about the critical importance of the long history of financial debt as a crucial element in understanding both Haiti’s past and its present, Peter James Hudson’s “The National City Bank of New York and Haiti, 1909–1922” makes clear the critical importance of Haiti as a touchstone of early twentieth-century US strategic and economic cannibalism in Latin America and the Caribbean. He examines the overlap of the US State Department’s strategic goals and City Bank finance capitalists’ project of international market expansion in a simultaneous—but not entirely coordinated—bid for hemispheric dominance. In doing so he reminds us that the history of twentieth-century United States political and capital investments in the “islands of the sea,” such as the Dominican Republic (1916–24), Cuba (1898–1902, 1906–9, 1912, 1917–22), Puerto Rico (1898 to present), and Trinidad (1940–49), is the history of militarization and occupation, and of cultural and racial ideas mobilized to service a transnational, regional concentration of power. As the United States occupied Haiti and the National City Bank absorbed the Banque Nationale de la République d’Haïti, Hudson exposes how the dialectic between institutional and individual decision making were imbued with a broader set of cultural and racial beliefs that both shaped and belied a putatively rational, progressive, and scientific-managerial approach to banking practice. Indeed, the bank’s approach to Haiti demonstrates the functioning of what Cedric Robinson calls “racial capitalism” within (and through) National City, which is, as Hudson suggests, at the core of understanding how the history of US engagement in Haiti unfolded.

Our next two articles address the tortuous history of US incarceration of Haitian exiles. Through her study of the Krome detention center—a repurposed missile site born in the wake of the 1980 Mariel boatlift—Jana K. Lipman documents how the changes at Krome demonstrate a shift from early Cold War fears of a nuclear attack to late Cold War fears of black migrants. Lipman shows that

Krome buoyed US foreign policy as the detention center helped keep black migrants from legal entry even as the United States continued to support Haiti's regimes that caused increasing numbers of Haitians to seek asylum within its borders. Continuing this story, A. Naomi Paik focuses on those HIV-positive Haitians detained at Guantánamo in the 1990s. She explores the violence of a paternalist US human rights discourse that enforced laws of exclusion as well as demonstrates how these conditions set the stage for Guantánamo to be used for detention in the twenty-first-century War on Terror. In doing so, she uncovers how Haitian detainees fought their incarceration at a camp that had become a "space of dying."

The "Curated Spaces" section of this issue highlights the work of two contemporary artists whose life and art document the breadth of Haitian experiences, representing the artistic vision of a foreign artist devoted to making repeated trips to document and study the country and a Haitian-born conceptual artist who was trained in the United States and lives and works in Europe. In "Kanaval: Vodou, Politics, and Revolution in the Streets of Haiti," Leah Gordon explores the annual pre-Lenten festival in Jacmel, a coastal village in southern Haiti, where history is far from "unthinkable." In a combination of oral history testimonies and photographs taken in the town's streets, Gordon attests to the ways in which people take "history into their own hands and [mold] it into whatever they decide." This combination of images and text, the product of a sixteen-year project, explores the rich and provocative deployment of costume, street theater, narrative, and satire that registers the juncture between Haiti's history and its present.

The art historian Jerry Philogene exhibits the work of the Berlin-based artist Jean-Ulrick Désert in the other contribution to our "Curated Spaces" section. Philogene's essay, "Meditations on Traveling Diasporically: Jean-Ulrick Désert and *Negerhosen2000*," interprets Désert's ongoing, parodically titled series of mixed-media works, in which the artist substitutes the word *Neger*, or black, for *Leder* in the iconic German folkloric garb. Both humorous and serious, Désert's conceptual art began as an urban "guerilla performance" piece that arose as a somewhat spontaneous but artistically conceived response to the racism that he experienced in urban public life. He uses the visual contradiction of a Caribbean black man dressed in traditional German white leather Lederhosen to conjure what Philogene interprets as a play on the nineteenth-century genteel urban *flaneur*, as the artist travels between worlds and strolls through European cities observing street culture and traditions. Désert's multilayered performance project constitutes an intervention in public space that challenges assumptions in an attempt to forge a radical black subjectivity. Both essays capture the way the artists destabilize the notions of fixed identity and a pristine racial space.

Two reviews of recent scholarship on Haiti only underscore the need for its students to revisit, reinterpret, and resituate Haiti in global histories. David Geggus examines four works on revolutionary Haiti: Laurent Dubois's *Haiti: The Aftershocks*

of *History* (2012); John D. Garrigus's *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (2006); Philippe R. Girard's *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801–1804* (2011); and Jeremy Popkin's *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (2010). None of these books is a single-volume overview of the Haitian Revolution, says Geggus, making them a departure from the dominant trend in literature on Haiti. Arguably, however, and as highlighted by Geggus, the authors' collective foci on regional, chronological, and thematic segments relating to the revolution (such as free coloreds and race, culture, and politics in the French Atlantic as well as the impact of French revolutionary politics on Caribbean society[ies]) begin the important process of resituating Haiti in the world.

Matthew J. Smith examines recent historiography on contemporary Haiti, specifically Kate Ramsey's *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (2011); Bernard Diederich's *The Price of Blood: History of Repression and Rebellion in Haiti under Dr. François Duvalier, 1957–1961* and *Murderers among Us: History of Repression and Rebellion in Haiti under Dr. François Duvalier, 1962–1971* (2011); Peter Hallward's *Damming the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment* (2010); Philippe Zacaïr's *Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora in the Wider Caribbean* (2011); and *Hàiti-Haitii? Philosophical Reflections for Mental Decolonization* (2011) by the former Catholic priest and president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Together these authors cover such themes as religion, politics, migration, imperialism, and dictatorship in Haiti; to varying degrees they help readers understand these themes as more than simply national questions. As Smith seems to suggest, following the earthquake Haiti's global relationships have taken on an increasingly sinewy quality, through such developments as faith-based missions for religious conversion and now humanitarian relief, Haitian migration to new sites in South America, particularly Brazil, which previously had almost no history of Haitian migration, and the extension of the historically heavy hand of the United States to Haiti's postquake recovery activities. Such factors testify to both continued foreign interest in Haitian development and the weight of its extranational prominence in global affairs.

In the closing piece of this issue, activist Toussaint Losier offers a brief remembrance of Jean Anil Louis-Juste, the Haitian teacher, scholar, intellectual, and activist who was gunned down just hours before the January 2010 earthquake struck. Losier recounts Louis-Juste's student strike leadership while at his university and, following the downfall of Jean-Claude Duvalier ("Baby Doc") in 1986, his political work among rural peasants as well as his struggle with other activists to press for an increase in the national minimum wage, a struggle that succeeded by October 2010 in raising the minimum wage to 200 *gourdes* in the assembly zones and 250 *gourdes* (\$6.25) in all other sectors. Louis-Juste's death before the earthquake further reminds those interested in Haitian history from abroad that, however transformative the natural disaster, the flood of international interest in Haiti

post-January 2010 must not obscure the writing, thinking about, and making history that had gone on there for centuries before.

To conclude, we coeditors would like to acknowledge the special assistance of those people without whom we could not have completed this issue. Numerous individuals helped us to transform the live event, "Telling Histories," into a published piece, especially Aiobheann Sweeney, director of the CUNY Center for the Humanities, who helped us realize our initial idea, Gary Wilder, who convened and moderated the panel, and Jane-Claire Quigley for her excellent work transcribing the audio recording. Michelle Stephens initiated our contact with the "Transnational Hispaniola" collective and was instrumental in transforming their conference proceedings into an essay for this issue. Michelle also brought to our attention and put us in communication with the artists whose work appears on this issue's cover. Conor McGrady, editor of the "Curated Spaces" section, and our amazing Associate Editor Tom Harbison were, as always, enormously helpful throughout the several-years-long process of producing this issue. Finally we are grateful to our colleagues who gave so much of their time to serve as anonymous readers for the submissions; we are continually amazed by the generosity of our fellow members of the Editorial Collective as well as the outside reviewers who have lent us their expertise.

—Amy Chazkel, Melina Pappademos, and Karen Sotiropoulos

Notes

1. Vladimir Cybil Charlier, personal communication with Melina Pappademos, May 7, 2012.
2. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (New York: Beacon Press, 1995). See, for example, Paul Cheney's essay in this issue. See also Doris Lorraine Garaway, ed., *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).
3. Deborah Jenson, "Hegel and Dessalines: Philosophy and the African Diaspora," *New West Indian Guide* 84, nos. 3–4 (2010), 275.

