Look . . . No, look! It’s alive. Sounding its charge through the fog. Lighting up the night. Canceling out the slave ship! The tremendous cavalcade! My friends, who have drunk bitter salt and the dark wine of the sand, I, we, flung down by the great surf, I have seen the enigmatic prow, blood foaming from its nostrils, plowing through the sea of shame!

May my people, my black people, salute the brackish tide of the future!

— Aimé Césaire, The Tragedy of King Christophe

Every morning at the first light of day, sixteen bulls were slaughtered among the construction works of the Citadelle Laferrière, atop the Pic Laferrière of the 970-meter Bonnet à l’Évêque, the tallest hill in the northern range of Haiti’s Massif du Nord (Figure 1). Their blood was mixed with the mortar so as to render the vast fortress impregnable. From the central plinth of the Citadelle, daybreak revealed a port city 15 kilometers to the north. That city in the independent nation of Haiti is now called Cap Haitien, colloquially Le Cap. It was named Cap Français when it was the center of trade in the French colony of Saint-Domingue; from 1811 to 1820, through the reign of Henri Christophe as King Henry I of Haiti, it was Cap Henri (Figure 2). Between the Citadelle and Cap Henri was the Plaine du Nord, whose sprawling plantations had once made Haiti the wealthiest colony in the world. Christophe’s draconian Code Rurale converted the people of Haiti from free citizens into compulsory agricultural and architectural laborers, a regime known as fermage. The Citadelle provided a panoramic view of this political geography, revealing the source of the trade goods on which Christophe’s fragile kingdom depended. Nearby, at the base of Bonnet à l'Évêque, in the town of Milot, stood Christophe’s neoclassical Sans-Souci Palace— the political center of his kingdom (Figure 3).

The early history of the Citadelle Laferrière and Sans-Souci Palace parallels the rise and fall of Henri Christophe as king of Haiti in the years following the expulsion of the French from the colony of Saint-Domingue. These buildings stand as monuments to the promise and ambition of an independent black nation in the heart of the West Indies, and to a tragic phase of the revolution that began with the defeat of Napoleon’s army in 1804 and the establishment of the nation of Haiti. Christophe began construction of the Citadelle in 1804 as commander of Haiti’s northern department under an ordinance signed on 4 April by President (later Emperor) Jean-Jacques Dessalines that provided for the fortification of the mountains surrounding the Plateau Central. Following Dessalines’s assassination in 1806, these fortifications became strategic posts in the ensuing civil war, which pitted Christophe against his fellow military commander under Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion. By 1807 a fragile truce established Pétion as president of the southern portion of Haiti, with Port-au-Prince as his capital; Christophe ruled the north from Le Cap. In 1811 Christophe declared himself king of the northern Kingdom of Haiti. His Citadelle Laferrière and Sans-Souci Palace were both inaugurated in 1813. In 1820, however, these buildings marked the sites his downfall. Paralyzed from a stroke, he lost his grip on power and watched as his kingdom broke apart. In October of that year he committed suicide as a rebel division approached Sans-Souci. His body was carried to the Citadelle, which would serve as his tomb, while the palace was looted.
Figure 1  Citadelle Laferrière, Bonnet à l’Évêque, Haiti, 1804–20 (SPC Gibran Torres).

Figure 2  Citadelle Laferrière, Bonnet à l’Évêque, Haiti, 1804–20, view from upper plinth overlooking Cap Haitien (author’s photo).

Figure 3  Sans-Souci Palace, Milot, Haiti, 1806–13 (author’s photo).
The Citadelle and Sans-Souci attained unique status in the cultural history of Haiti when authors celebrating the pan-African postcolonial literary movement known as négri-
tude cast the Haitian Revolution as a founding event of black transnational political consciousness. Aimé Césaire described Haiti in his 1939 Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land) as the site “where négritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its humanity.” In his 1945 “Prière de paix” (“Prayer for Peace”), Léopold Sédar Senghor described a crucified Africa spanning the Old and New Worlds: “[Her] right arm stretches over my lands, and her left arm shades America / And her heart is beloved Haiti, Haiti who dared to proclaim Man before the Tyrant.”

C. L. R. James’s 1949 The Black Jacobins deployed the Haitian Revolution and the death of its leader, Toussaint Louverture, in a narrative of the tragedy of colonial enlightenment.

The Citadelle and Sans-Souci now became monuments to négritude and its origins. Alejo Carpentier, in his 1949 novel El reino de este mundo (The Kingdom of This World), and Aimé Césaire, in his 1963 play La tragédie du roi Christophe (The Tragedy of King Christophe), both deployed the Citadelle and Sans-Souci to examine the rule of a tyrannical king who embodied both the ambitions of a sovereign black nation and the violence through which those ambitions were to be achieved. For Césaire, the Citadelle indicated both the enslavement of the Haitian people under Christophe’s rule and their capacity to transform the material world through collective effort. Later still, these ambiguous relics became privileged sites of Haitian nationalism when President Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier formed the Parc National Historique–Citadelle, Sans Souci, Ramiers in 1978. This administrative designation allowed UNESCO to establish the park as a World Heritage Site in 1982, citing the status of the Citadelle and Sans-Souci as “universal symbols of liberty, being the first monuments to be constructed by black slaves who had gained their freedom.”

There are no factual records or archives pertaining to the building histories of the Citadelle and Sans-Souci. The architects are unnamed, as are the thousands of people who died in their construction. What stand instead are the myths, legends, and literary production built over two centuries, and from these arise questions. How, in the absence of a historical record, might myths, legends, and literature do the work of history? How can they give sense to historical events that, in the words of historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot, were unthinkable even as they occurred? The Citadelle and Sans-Souci are artifacts of postrevolutionary Haiti, and their reception over time has marked the shifting status of the revolution in historical memory. By reading across a variety of sources about them—mythical and legendary in addition to historical and archaeological—we might open up larger methodological questions about how we could use these buildings and the stories around them to study the ambiguous politics of the revolutionary condition.

The literary and historical production surrounding the Citadelle and Sans-Souci are indeed mythic. The main biographical sources on the life of Christophe, Vergniaud Lecomte’s 1931 Henri Christophe dans l’histoire d’Haiti and Hubert Cole’s 1967 Christophe, King of Haiti, place outlandish stories—culled from various nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources—alongside well-researched documentary histories. If absences in the archive have given rise to legends and literary production, perhaps the architecture’s capacity as a generator of stories provides us with another kind of archive through which we can reconstruct a version of these buildings’ histories.

Mythic Constructions

The Citadelle consists of an irregular quadrangle with a tower projecting from each of its four corners. Its sheer walls, measuring up to 45 meters high, are slightly canted to support the weight of the edifice and contain several levels of cannon batteries. These military defenses surround the infrastructure of a compound intended to sustain five thousand people during a siege. This compound includes quarters, storerooms, and kitchens, as well as a powder magazine and the governor’s palace. Albert Mangonès, an energetic advocate for the recognition of the Citadelle Laferrière and Sans-Souci as sites of historical memory and the architect who undertook their reconstruction from 1979 to 1990, imagined the massive Citadelle, covering 10,000 square meters (2.5 acres), as “emerg[en]g from the clouds,” a “phantom vessel, riding the swell of a magic ocean suddenly stilled in the midst of the storm.” Following this nautical metaphor, the jutting angle of the forward rampart, the Batterie Coidavid, has come to be known as the Citadelle’s “prow” (Figure 4). According to Cole, “From below, the fortress, shaped like the prow of a ship, seemed to ride almost lightly on the crest of the clouds, and only from the top of the path could its true size be appreciated, its walls, varying from eighty to one hundred and thirty feet high, lined with cannon dominating the approaches.” This “prow” was not merely defensive; it was Christophe’s intentional evocation of a slave ship. In Césaire’s play, Christophe describes his vision: “See how its head dreams towards the clouds, its feet plumb the abyss, while its mouths spit grapeshot as far as the open sea and the hollow of the valleys; it is a city, a fortress, a battleship of stone!”

It is widely believed that the Citadelle houses 365 cannons appropriated from European armies in retreat, which still bear their seals: a cannon for each day of the year, a state of perpetual war (an accurate count finds 163 cannons). In these narratives the structure stands for the revolutionary potential of an independent Haiti, a refuge for a people freed from...
slavery, a fortress forever turned toward the sea, always watching for invaders.

If the revolutionary capacity of Haiti is monumentalized in the Citadelle, so too are the brutal means by which Christophe ruled his kingdom. Throughout the stories of Christophe’s tyrannical reign we find references to the Citadelle. For example, Corneille Brelle, archbishop of Haiti and Christophe’s confessor, asked permission to return to France to see his ailing mother. Suspicious that Brelle would reveal the secrets of the confessional to the French, Christophe confined the archbishop to his urban palace and had the doors and windows sealed. According to Cole, it was the German military engineers who worked on the Citadelle that Christophe feared most. Upon the building’s completion, they were imprisoned in the Citadelle and “forbidden to leave for fear that they would betray its secrets.” In yet another story, Henri Barré, purported architect of the Citadelle, was given permission to return to France after the fortress’s completion, but as his ship set sail from Cap Henri, Christophe launched a single cannonball from the Citadelle, which arced its 15-kilometer path to the harbor and struck the ship, killing all on board.

All Haitian workers not committed to agricultural production were sent to work on the Citadelle. An illuminated initial by Mahlon Blaine in John Vandercook’s 1928 *Black Majesty: The Life of Christophe, King of Haiti* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928], 149) depicts Christophe observing the workers during construction of the Citadelle (Figure 5). Cole notes that Christophe had a telescope installed in each of his palaces and was accompanied at all times by a page carrying a spyglass: “His subjects soon began to believe the stories that he used the instrument to oversee them from afar, . . . and that in one instance he had trained a gun on an idler and blown off his head at a distance of two miles.” This mythical power over distance was a terror to people living in fear of their all-seeing monarch. Another of Christophe’s residences, the Palace of Belle-Rivière, came to be called the Palace of 365 Doors and Windows, 365 apertures for a perpetual watch (in fact, the palace has just over 100 doors and windows). Mistrustful of the habits of former slaves, Christophe created the Royal-Dahomets, a police force made up of 4,000 soldiers from the Kingdom of Dahomey (in present-day Benin). The most elite troops in the force were the 150 Royal Bon-Bons, tasked with enforcing the *Code Rurale*. To come across a valuable item lying in the street was a curse to Haitians, who would immediately assume a trap set by these Royal Bon-Bons. The punishment for any infraction was labor at the Citadelle.

Christophe’s power knew no limits. When a French envoy from Louis XVIII’s reconstructed monarchy, Colonel Medina, was exposed as a provocateur intent on reestablishing slavery in the former colony, Christophe made him attend his own elaborate state funeral, complete with a requiem mass,
with his execution to follow. At the ceremony’s end Christophe considered his point made and pardoned the terrified colonel before returning him to France. Not even the gods could escape Christophe’s wrath. In his play, Césaire depicts Christophe brandishing his sword after lightning has struck the Citadelle’s powder magazine during a massive storm, killing his brother-in-law, Prince Nöel. “Peter, Saint we all adore,” Christophe intones, “do you challenge us to war?” In other versions he declared war on God by firing a cannonball straight up into the heavens. It was often said that Christophe marched a detachment of his Royal-Dahomets off the highest face of the Citadelle just to exhibit their loyalty to an astonished British diplomat.

In all of these stories the Citadelle acts as an index for Christophe. For Césaire, the two are indistinguishable; he shows Christophe declaring, “[Know] that my soul stands upright, inviolate, sound, just like our Citadel stricken yet unshaken, the very image of our Citadel is Christophe!” The Citadelle was the highly visible stronghold of an all-seeing sovereign; it was the site of Christophe’s power over life and death, and, ultimately, it was his tomb. When the paralyzed and powerless king shot himself as rebellious masses gathered outside the gates of Sans-Souci, his body was ushered up the steep path to the Citadelle and deposited into a heap of mortar. Carpentier describes Christophe’s interment:

Having chosen his own death, Henri Christophe would never know the corruption of his flesh, flesh fused with the very stuff of the fortress, inscribed in its architecture, integrated with its body bristling with flying buttresses. Le Bonnet de l’Évêque, the whole mountain, had become the mausoleum of the first King of Haiti.

Christophe thus joined the architects and the countless builders of the Citadelle who were also permanently interred within its walls, mixed with the mythic power of bull’s blood, overlooking Cap Haitien and the sea beyond (Figure 6).

Architecture of a “Fleet in Being”

The Citadelle and Sans-Souci represented Haitian leaders’ ongoing efforts to resolve the realities of political autonomy in the colonial West Indies with the ambitions of the new revolutionary government. Each phase of the buildings’ construction marked a change in the political conditions of the nation as well as the claims the nation made upon the Haitian Revolution. We might mark the origins of these buildings in the French counterrevolution that began with Napoleon’s coup d’état of 18 Brumaire on 9 November 1799. By that date the initial phase of the Haitian Revolution had concluded with Toussaint Louverture leading an autonomous colony. Napoleon sought to retake the rebellious colony, sending his brother-in-law, Charles Leclerc, to depose the existing military order of Toussaint and return Saint-Domingue to its prerevolutionary condition, with blacks enslaved under white planters.

While the restoration of the plantation economy and the rebuilding of the Atlantic trade routes were priorities for Toussaint, a scorched-earth policy was always in effect. At the threat of an overwhelming invasion the people could immediately militarize by abandoning the cities and returning to the revolutionary condition of marronage—that is, living in autonomous settlements in the hills. On 4 February 1802, this is what happened when the city of Cap Français burned. Christophe, as commander of the northern precinct, had prepared the city ahead of Leclerc’s invasion. He distributed barrels of tar throughout the rooms of his mansion on Rue Royale, and at the first report of French attack he ordered his lieutenants to break the barrels, spreading the flammable
slurry throughout his home. He then set the fire himself; the order to burn the city was signaled by the flames engulfing own residence. His troops destroyed Cap François and its collected wealth and retreated to the hills of the Massif du Nord to engage in a guerrilla campaign.

After an extended war that saw the death of Leclerc from malaria and of Toussaint following his capture and imprisonment in the Jura Mountains, the guerrilla forces defeated the French army, then under the command of Rochambeau, at Vertières on 18 November 1803. The nation of Haiti, the first independent black nation in the Western Hemisphere, was founded on 1 January 1804. At its head was Dessalines, who took the title of emperor in October, with Christophe and Pétion as his top commanders. The final article of Dessalines’s 1805 constitution declared that “at the first shot from the warning gun, the towns shall be destroyed and the nation shall rise in arms,” codifying into law the actions Christophe took in torching Cap François. In the case of a foreign invasion, Haiti’s entire population would retreat to the interior of the nation to wage a guerrilla campaign. Dessalines constructed a system of fortifications, fourteen in the Massif du Nord alone, to deny invaders access to the country’s interior.

Christophe was charged with building the northern defenses, including Laferrière, which was at the time just one of the fortresses defending the strategic corridors from Cap Haitien to the north and Gonaïves to the west. Archaeological evidence shows that the Citadelle underwent five phases of construction, the earliest of which deployed a Vauban system of defense, artifacts of which are the ramparts of the base, including the so-called prow. This defensive system, introduced by the Marquis de Vauban under Louis XIV, was designed to hold territory. In France, for instance, Vauban’s pré carré consisted of a double line of twenty-eight forts across the amorphous zone between French and Walloon estates. The angled ramparts of the forts were designed to seal a perimeter that would demarcate the boundaries of the French nation.

In Haiti, once the perimeters of the forts were secured, the defensive strategy shifted to a Montalembert system. Marc-René, Marquis de Montalembert, published his eleven-volume *Fortification perpendiculaire (Perpendicular Fortification)* between 1776 and 1794 in response to the inability of the Vauban system to address the exigencies of naval attack and to defend coastal areas from invading fleets. While the Vauban system protected and demarcated territory, colonial plunder took place in the extraterritorial space of the oceans. The European powers in competition for control over the wealth of a colony need not hold its territory—it was preferable simply to blockade the islands and depend on privateers to pillage any exports. Whereas Vauban defended against close combat, Montalembert organized his defenses around artillery; angled ramparts became less critical than towers with far-reaching sight lines, as height and reach were favored over strength and proximity.

The Montalembert system effectively worked as a “fleet in being,” a seventeenth-century naval strategy in which ships would be kept in port not to demarcate a territory in the seas and submit it to military control but to serve as a mode of “sea denial” that would prevent any power from establishing a fixed strategic position. This strategy, by which a power could protect the flow of goods without maintaining a fixed position that would demarcate a sovereign territory, was originally developed as a technique of colonialism. In Paul Virilio’s discussion of a politics of dromology (the logic of speed), the fleet in being becomes the perfect armature of a guerrilla strategy. Rather than demarcating a fixed space, the fleet in being determines an open and indeterminate site of action. The refusal to hold territory rejects a politics of stasis and closure in favor of continuous movement and perpetual transition. Dessalines’s forts—the Citadelle included—were not designed to hold the territory of the Plaine du Nord; rather, they were intended to prevent any invading army from doing so.

**Sans-Souci Palace**

Dessalines was assassinated on 17 October 1806, under the orders of Pétion and with the tacit support of Christophe. A subsequent alliance between the two leaders was short-lived. Christophe refused the offer of a ceremonial presidency in a government run by Pétion, and they were soon at war. Pétion became president (later, president for life) in the south, and Christophe became king of the north.

Dessalines’s title of emperor had made supranational claims for slave emancipation in the West Indies. At a time when Napoleon was toppling the ossified kingdoms of Europe to usher in a new age, Dessalines imagined himself as a world-historical actor who would topple the slave regimes of the West Indies. Aware that Napoleon would be crowned emperor of France in December 1804, Dessalines had himself crowned emperor of Haiti eight weeks in advance, on 2 October. Christophe’s later title of king is emblematic of the tension, described by historian Doris Garraway, in the relationship between freedom and sovereignty in Christophe’s kingdom. Garraway identifies an extensive universality that spoke to ambitions of pan-African emancipation, one that was at odds with the intensive universality that reflected the realpolitik of a free state in the colonial West Indies. Maintaining universal freedom from slavery within Haiti came at the cost of neglecting to export the revolution outside its borders, and of failing to guarantee individual sovereignty within. As Nick Nesbitt points out in a recent study, the shift from empire to kingdom signals this retreat from the universalist ambitions of global emancipation to the insular preservation of Haitian independence.
In a portrait created in 1816 and displayed at the Royal Academy in London in 1818, English painter Richard Evans portrayed Christophe in the military dress of a nineteenth-century monarch (Figure 7). Adorned only by the medallion on his left breast of his self-fashioned Order of Saint Henry—a clear imitation of the star of the British Order of the Garter worn by George III—he holds a military bicorn hat while his crown rests on a stand cropped by the margin of the image. Christophe built his court in a day, creating a “hereditary” nobility on 5 April 1811 that included an array of princes, dukes, counts, barons, and knights, all taking their titles from the plantations they owned—more often than not, the same ones on which they were once enslaved. On 7 April, Christophe established a religious hierarchy, personally elevating Corneille Brelle to archbishop of Haiti (which precipitated the chaplain’s excommunication by Rome), and on 20 April he founded the Royal Order of Chivalry and the Military Order of Saint-Henry. With the institutions of sovereign power set in place, on 2 June 1811 Christophe had himself crowned Henry I, king of Haiti (adopting the Anglicized spelling of his name).40

Sans-Souci was the heart of his monarchy. The expansive complex housed the diverse functions of the Haitian state, including Christophe’s palace. Adjoining the palace were the executive offices of the Council of State and the Chamber of Ministers (Figure 8). In the low valley to the north, the Champs de Mars housed the military command and exercise grounds (Figure 9). Lastly, the Church of the Pantheon, adjacent to the palace gates, held the remains of Haiti’s revolutionary heroes (Figure 10).31 Sans-Souci thus contained virtually all the major elements of the state within its precincts, with spaces for royal, political, military, religious, and memorial functions.

For much of the century after Christophe’s death, a variety of authors deployed the Citadelle and Sans-Souci in order to frame—and often undermine—the historical legacy of the Haitian Revolution. These included French and British merchants, members of the British colonial administration, and American abolitionists—all of whom had a stake in the historical reception of the revolution and whose works, taken together, constitute a colonial Atlantic literature. For some, these buildings were evidence of the failure—and the folly—of black independence in the West Indies. For others, the Citadelle and Sans-Souci displayed the ambitions of an independent nation restrained by the tyranny of its ruler.

For Baron de Vastey, Christophe’s secretary and scribe, the project of Haiti was the revival of an African nobility whose accomplishments had once exceeded those of Europe. Sans-Souci stood as a monument to this legacy. In his description of the palace upon its completion in 1813, Vastey wrote:

“This year we witnessed the completion of the palace of Sans Souci, and the royal church of that town. These two structures, erected by the descendants of Africans, shew that we have not lost the architectural taste and genius of our ancestors who covered Ethiopia, Egypt, Carthage, and Old Spain, with their superb monuments.”

While Vastey placed Sans-Souci within a pan-African context, other observers situated the palace within European traditions. German geographer Carl Ritter, a pioneer of modern geography, was in Haiti at the time of Christophe’s death and visited the palace just eighteen days later. Ritter’s 1836 account provides an early description of Sans-Souci, while accompanying lithographs show the palace and its grounds in their original condition (Figures 11 and 12). Ritter describes the sumptuous European-style draperies, mirrors, polished stone floors, and mahogany furniture of the palace; his description forms the basis of most subsequent accounts and images. English naturalist James Franklin considered the building as “little, if at all inferior to some of the most admired edifices of Europe,” while the New Hampshire–based physician Jonathan Brown described the building as “a sort of Louvre.”

For observers more skeptical of Christophe’s reign, Sans-Souci was neither classical nor palatial, but crudely utilitarian.
Figure 8  Sans-Souci Palace, Milot, Haiti, 1806–13, plan, existing conditions (Institut de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine National, Haiti).

Figure 9  Sans-Souci Palace complex, Milot, Haiti, 1806–13, Champs de Mars, military barracks and hospital (author’s photo).

Figure 10  Sans-Souci Palace complex, Milot, Haiti, 1806–13, Church of the Pantheon (author’s photo).
For the Queen's College historian W. W. Harvey, writing in 1827, Haiti represented “a people newly escaped from slavery, yet still suffering and exhibiting in their character, its pernicious and demoralizing effect.” The kingdom of Christophe represented an intermediate phase in a dialectical process from enslavement to liberty; its cruelties were the direct effects of the injustices committed by the planters and colonists who had previously controlled Saint-Domingue. Sans-Souci, in this sense, was a marker of an early and incomplete effort toward a refinement in the arts that would mark a refinement in spirit. As Harvey describes the palace:

Either from policy or from caprice, Christophe caused the windows of this palace to be disproportionately small, to be placed in the most irregular manner, and to be divided into parts as diminutive as they could be conveniently made. They were at the same time exceedingly numerous; and had they been placed in a more regular order, the exterior would, in this respect, have borne no slight resemblance to an English manufactory.
Harvey here offers the first instance of a trope that would persist throughout the building’s historiography: that Sans-Souci more closely resembled a factory than it did a palace. In 1830, Charles Mackenzie, working on behalf of a British government still hostile to the Haitian Revolution and slave emancipation in the West Indies, described a “large clumsy building on the side of a mountain, resembling a huge cotton factory,” a structure that symbolized the despotism of Christophe.47 John Candler, an American abolitionist sympathetic to Haitian independence, lamented the state of disrepair in which he found the palace in 1842, remarking on its appearance as “a huge deserted cotton factory.”48 If for Harvey the resemblance to a manufactory indicated a path toward Haiti’s future development in the arts, for later authors it alluded to the incapacity of former slaves to match European achievements. Recall that the centers of the African slave trade were called “factories.” Moreover, as cotton became a leading commodity of the nineteenth-century Atlantic world and the cotton factory the archetype of an industrial architecture, this descriptor situated the independent nation of Haiti back within the circuits of global commodity production. Sans-Souci’s architecture was neither royal nor noble, but industrial and functional. The palace stood as material proof that Haiti could never exceed its status as an export market.

These descriptions frame Haiti, via Christophe’s buildings, within the logic of colonialism. Perhaps, however, by looking at the architecture anew and in relation to Christophe’s self-fashioning as royalty, we might gain insight into the political imaginary of his postcolonial kingdom.

Sans-Souci had two main elevations: the north was the building’s public face, and the south looked out on the royal family’s private pleasure garden. The palace’s north elevation, set atop a retaining wall, provided the ceremonial entrance from the town of Milot (Figure 13). A pair of monumental staircases flanked a fountain set within two heavy buttresses and a rusticated triumphal arch (Figure 14). The staircases led to a Doric hexastyle propylaeum with an entablature of elaborate metopes and dentils forming a balcony for the king (Figure 15). On either side of this were austere wings punctuated by simple round arches and terminated in three-story towers.

Where the northern propylaeum employed rich architectural detail, the south side was more restrained in detail and yet more formally expressive, framed by shallow pilasters and topped with a curved pediment adorned with small dentils (Figure 16). A series of curved staircases emerged from the concave walls of the portico to create the meandering terraced landscape of the Jardins de Roi (Figure 17). The scale of the south or garden elevation was far more intimate than that of the imposing north entrance. Its curved elements responded to the informal setting of the garden.

The narrow eastern elevation fronted the Patio de Caïmitier (named for a succulent Caribbean fruit and the tree that bears it)—a rectangular garden atop the berm adjacent to the palace that functioned as Christophe’s outdoor court (Figure 18). This patio offered a panoramic view of the entirety of the compound. Ritter describes a large mahogany throne located in this garden from which Christophe could survey the functions of state as he held court.

Recent historians have observed that Sans-Souci Palace is an assemblage of architectural elements that do not fit cleanly into any single style. Francis Leary, writing in the UNESCO Courier in 1994, described Sans-Souci as an amalgamation of diverse European precedents, including the fountains, canals, and basins of Versailles, the terrace and double marble staircase of Fontainebleau, and the tile roof and stucco walls of Potsdam.49 According to Michael Hall, it was “built to mirror the beauty of Versailles and highlight the potential for wealth.
Delatour and Péard argue that Sans-Souci must be seen in the light of the revolutionary Projets de l’An II, joining Thomas Jefferson’s University of Virginia and Monticello as American exemplars of French revolutionary architecture.\textsuperscript{51} That Christophe chose the same name for his palace that Frederick the Great gave to his complex at Potsdam has caused some observers to expect direct Prussian influence. Many assume that Christophe employed German engineers familiar with the Potsdam palace, and that they were attempting to build a replica of it for him. Trouillot provides a thorough historiography of this attribution and in the end dismisses the claim.\textsuperscript{52} No more than a cursory comparison of the two palaces is necessary to refute any such provenance. Both are built atop berms, but similarities end there. The ornate rococo caryatids that line the perimeter of the Potsdam Sanssouci could not be further from the austere classicism of Christophe’s palace. Some have argued that Christophe adopted an established name in an effort to invoke the customs of the European aristocracy. In fact, he gave all of his fifteen palaces fanciful names, such as Délices-de-la-Reine, Bonne-Fortune, and Bellevue-le-Roi (Delights of the Queen, Good Fortune, and Beautiful View the King).\textsuperscript{53} The phrase sans souci might mean “care-free,” alluding to the leisure of court life, or perhaps “without worry,” referencing the isolated location that made the palace easily defensible. Mackenzie implies that the name refers to the discretion that the remote location provided for Christophe’s licentious behavior.\textsuperscript{54}

**Found Objects of a Postcolonial Neoclassicism**

In *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Césaire depicts Vastey celebrating the kingdom of Haiti as “this black kingdom, this
court, a perfect replica in black of the best old Europe has to offer!" According to Edgar La Selve, a professor of theology at the Lycée Port-au-Prince and a critic of Christophe’s regime, the Haitian king’s mahogany throne was placed under the Caïmitier tree at Sans-Souci in emulation of Louis IX, who put his throne under an oak at his palace at Vincennes and there received petitioners. Carpentier imagines Christophe moving through the palace’s Hall of Mirrors, which “reflected only the figure of the King to the farthest reaches of the most remote mirrors.” Ritter reports having seen a large wooden sun on the giant retaining wall that supported Sans-Souci Palace. It was painted black and bore the strange inscription “Je vois tout et tout voit par moi dans l’univers” (literally, “I see all and all sees by me in the universe”). Louis XIV, the Sun King, had deployed the insignia of the sun with the almost untranslatable inscription “Nec pluribus impar” (Not unequal to many? Alone above all?) as a marker of his enlightened if authoritarian rule. For Christophe, however, the blackened sun emits a dark light that only obscures.

Enlightenment discourses that tied racial whiteness to notions of the good necessarily placed nonwhites in an inexorable condition of inadequacy. Immanuel Kant, for instance, in discussing the national characteristics of man as related to the appreciation of beauty and the sublime, argued that “the Negroes of Africa have by their nature no feeling that rises above the trifling.” Nonwhites were, in short, assumed to be unable to appreciate either the beautiful or the sublime in art or in nature. The stakes here were greater than mere aesthetic taste. Appreciation of the sublime, for Kant, was an essential component of the capacity for moral feeling. To have no
recourse to the sublime was to be fundamentally incapable of moral virtue and moral responsibility. By extension, an enlightened state simply could not be founded upon blackness. In a classic double bind, colonial powers often made it impossible for the colonized and enslaved to attain the natural rights presumed by enlightenment and then used the inability to claim these rights as justification for enslavement. Thus, the revolutionary project of the French Republic omitted enslaved peoples in the colonies from the universal rights enumerated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. To have seen this enlightenment as purely mythical—as a rational construct masking the sordid desire for domination—must not have been difficult for those Haitian revolutionaries, who, rather than try to adhere to its normative condition, implemented instead its radicalization. Dessalines’s 1805 constitution addressed this incommensurability between the particularity of blackness and the universality of enlightenment. This document did not simply declare freedom for all enslaved people or declare all blacks to be full citizens of Haiti. It declared all Haitians, whatever their origins, to be black. Rather than resort to the universalism of enlightenment, Dessalines’s Haiti generalized the particularity of blackness as the foundation of the state. This radicalization of enlightenment was to privilege the excluded; those without proper access to the universal rights enumerated determined a particularity—racial blackness—that preceded the universal.

For the political philosopher Claude Lefort, the essence of modernity is found in the exposure of instabilities between the symbolic order of the state and the real systems through which political power is formed and maintained. Lefort locates this moment in the rupture of the natural from the supernatural body of the king—that is, the split between the corporeal legislative forms of governance and its divinely granted authority. Historically, this occurred when Louis XVI was marched through Paris as “citoyen Louis Capet”—a subject of the state. The symbolic order on which the state was maintained came into conflict with the real systems through which it operated. Christophe, for his part, cut to the heart of sovereign power, which he knew had its last resort in violence. By appropriating its ultimate marker of sovereignty in the title of king of Haiti, he operated in a liminal space between sovereign legitimation and its lack of solid ground.

On its surface, Sans-Souci seems a simple appropriation of the affects of European aristocracy, but perhaps the relation is not so clear-cut. While certainly monumental, Sans-Souci is not univocal. Each elevation opens up a unique mise-en-scène upon the palace grounds and presents a different aspect of the state. These aspects taken together—the oblique monumentality of the north elevation, the playfulness of the south, the enclosed east, and the public west—refuse the coherence of a singular architectural edifice. Instead, they offer a disjointed set of elevations. Nick Nesbitt argues that Christophe—through the writings of Vastey—constituted a foundational act in a Caribbean critique that would come to include C. L. R. James, Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Édouard Glissant. Vastey’s 1814 Le système colonial dévoilé, according to Nesbitt, represents “one of the most extraordinary texts of this uncompromising critique of constituted, legitimate authorities and their attendant monopolies on violence and terror.” Perhaps the palace operates in the space between sovereign legitimation and the inherent lack of legitimacy of Haiti as anything other than a rebellious, breakaway colony. To be black and a king, to create a nobility in a single day and call it hereditary, to form a religious order without the sanction of Rome: all of these may have been hapless attempts at sovereign legitimation. But perhaps these were self-conscious efforts to reveal the underlying absence of sovereign right that was exposed in the modern rupture of the symbolic order from the real.

![Figure 18 Sans-Souci Palace, Milot, Haiti, 1806–13, west elevation as seen from the Patio de Caïmitier (author’s photo).](http://online.ucpress.edu/jsah/article-pdf/184336/jsah_2018_77_4_410.pdf)
Within the territory of the colonial enlightenment, the architecture of Sans-Souci Palace appears at first to be, at best, a mode of colonial mimicry that is epistemically inadequate to the enlightenment that it would claim. (The extensive effort by historians to determine exactly which architectural precedent it fails to appropriately fulfill speaks directly to this.) On reflection, however, Sans-Souci’s simultaneous deployment and dismantlement of the symbolic order of the neoclassical is not reducible to the determinations of precedent; it seems instead to empty out these forms, showing them to be internally vacant. As Homi Bhabha describes this condition, “In the ambivalent world . . . on the margins of metropolitan desire, the founding objects of the Western world become the erratic, eccentric, accidental _objets trouvés_ of the colonial discourse—the part-objects of presence.” Sans-Souci strips these objects of their representational authority, divulging a chasm between the symbolic order of the state and its ground in violence. We might consider this to be at the heart of Sans-Souci’s modernity.

Atop the Bonnet à l’Évêque, the Citadelle completes this strategy. The northernmost structure on the plinth, located above the raking angle of the Citadelle’s prow and overlooking Cap Haitien, is the Governor’s House: the palace in exile where Christophe would retreat in the event of war. Its northern elevation with its heavy stone buttresses is capped by the delicate sculpted entablature of Sans-Souci, while two of the palace’s stuccoed guardhouses flank its low rectangular door (Figure 19). This elevation steps onto the Batterie de Pont Levie, whose cannons pivot around the vertical loopholes of its defensive walls. This fourth elevation of Sans-Souci, displaced from the palace grounds, overlooks the fields of war.

**Conclusion: Tragic Architecture of the Revolutionary State**

Christophe’s home in Cap Français burned to the ground in 1802. Perhaps it was always assumed that Sans-Souci would one day do the same. But if Sans-Souci burned, Christophe had a plan to preserve the state. According to Vastey, this would be the ultimate role of the Citadelle.

“My children,” would the king say to the Haytians, “in the first war of independence we had to encounter every sort of privation, this time we shall be in want of nothing, I have provided every thing. While you are engaged with the enemy, your wives and children will be in safety, they will be protected by the impregnable citadels with which I have covered the country. You will have for yourselves and families necessaries of every description, which I have collected for the wants of the army and the people.” “Heretofore,” he would again say to them, “we were obliged to traverse the mountains without a place for shelter; our warlike stores, our treasures, and our booty, were all at the mercy of the enemy. Now this is no more the case, we can defend ourselves securely in impregnable citadels.”

Dessalines’s strategy of fortification had been to maintain the revolution. With Christophe’s transformation of these fortifications into citadels to protect Haitian families and their treasures, the nation, the social imaginary of a collective Haitian people, could still be lost, but the state, the centralization of political power, would be preserved. Dessalines placed forts atop the mountains of the Massif du Nord to deny access to the Plaine Centrale, not to demarcate a territory contiguous with the state. Christophe’s transformation of the fort at Laferrière into the Citadelle determined the state, but it did not demarcate a territory. With the Citadelle
Laferrière, all of Haiti was left outside the boundary of the enclosed siege state. Rather than serving as one junction along the perimeter of the defensible state, it enclosed that entire state within its walls. Its population would remain subjects of the king, yet without recourse to the state itself—colonial subjects of the Citadelle’s metropole.

By the time of the Citadelle’s induction as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982, the politics of negritude had reached a schism in Haiti. On one side was a Marxist branch, typified by René Depestre, who sought black transnational solidarity. On the other side was its “delirious mystification” in the nationalism of François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, who solidified power by harnessing a reactionary notion of negritude for the purpose of terrorizing his opponents. In 1976, Senghor, the poet who became president of Senegal, began the push for global recognition of the cultural heritage represented by Sans-Souci and the Citadelle by donating U.S.$60,000 to create a fund to restore these monuments of negritude. The following year Baby Doc Duvalier turned the restoration into an official state project. The appearance of Césaire’s The Tragedy of King Christophe during the Duvalier years underlined the similarity between the two regimes—where Christophe’s Royal-Dahomets were exchanged for Papa Doc’s Tonton Macoutes. But for the Duvalier regime, the essence of the tragedy was only that Christophe was struck down too soon and left unable to see his great national project to its completion.

Perhaps, though, the real tragedy of King Christophe was the transformation of the ephemeral revolution into a state apparatus. Revolutionary victory is always a chimera, as the transformation of the ephemeral revolution into a state...

Christophe carried it beyond the threshold it must never cross: into the realm of the state. Yet he necessarily could not have recognized this boundary even as he passed it, because its markers were not visible to him: the moment that the revolution is annihilated appears exactly the same as the point at which it is generalized.

On the evening of 8 October 1820, Christophe’s Sans-Souci Palace was slated to burn. A revolutionary uprising declared the final article of Dessalines’s constitution—that “at the first shot from the warning gun, the towns shall be destroyed and the nation shall rise in arms”—a fact and signaled the dissolution of Christophe’s state. It was not Christophe who gave the order, but the rebellious troops facing off against the last of the royal guard while shouting, “Liberty! No slavery! No king!” and “Vive la liberté! Brisons les chaînes de l’esclavage!” Christophe believed that only a golden bullet could kill the king. Incapacitated by his recent stroke, he shot himself in the heart with one as the rebellious army approached under the leadership of the Duc de Marmelade, who had shed his noble title to reclaim the name General Richard.75

The Citadelle had always been a personification of Christophe, but only in death—interred in the lime, cane pulp, and bull’s blood of the mortar—could Christophe achieve unity with his creation. This is a unity of irresolvable terms that remains ambiguous to this day. The Citadelle stood as both the stronghold of the Haitian Revolution and the last resort of a tyrannical state. This ambiguity extends as well to Sans-Souci, which was both an act of colonial mimicry undermining its model and a reification of the state apparatus. For Césaire, the kingdom of Christophe had been a danse macabre all along. In the final act of The Tragedy of King Christophe, the character Hugonin, a “mixture of parasite, fool, and political agent,” who has sung parodic countermelodies to Christophe’s heroic prose, brings home to Christophe his tragic folly by revealing himself to be Bawon Samedi—the god of the vodoun underworld.

Carpentier best describes the final interment of Christophe in his Citadelle:

Henri Christophe’s thoughts went back to the Citadel. Ultima Ratio Regum. But that stronghold, unique in the world, was too vast for one man, and the monarch had never thought the day might come when he would find himself alone. The bull’s blood that those thick walls had drunk was an ineffable charm against the arms of the white men. But this blood had never been directed against Negroes, whose shouts, coming closer now, were invoking powers to which they had made blood sacrifice.

Like titles of nobility cast off, the defensive capacity of the Citadelle simply dissolved. Christophe’s Citadelle had been designed to stand against the collected powers of Europe, but...
it proved ultimately helpless against the simple withdrawal of consensus by the king’s own subjects.

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**Notes**

1. This article stems from my dissertation, “The Incommensurability of Modernity: Architecture and the Anarchic from Enlightenment Revolution to Liberal Reconstruction,” completed at Columbia University in 2016. I thank my dissertation adviser, Reinhold Martin, for his guidance throughout this project, committee members Felicity Scott and Stathis Gourgouris for their thoughtful feedback and support, and readers Mabel Wilson and Erika Naginski for their insightful comments. The staff at Institut de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine National (ISPAN) in Port-au-Prince provided access to key archaeological and historical sources. Matthew Rary commented on an earlier draft. Reemi Capdevila Werning offered feedback throughout this process. Portions of this article were presented at the 2017 conference of the Society of Architectural Historians and in an invited lecture hosted by the French and Italian Department at Oberlin College; I thank my colleagues at both venues for their feedback. I thank JSAH editor Keith Eggener and the anonymous reviewer for their considered analysis that helped me develop a final version of this article and Keith Eggener especially for his patient editing and clarification of the manuscript.

2. Both Alejo Carpentier and Aimé Césaire offer versions of this story. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006); Aimé Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe: A Play*, trans. Paul Breslin and Rachel Ney (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015). This particular account was related to me by my assigned guide at the National Historic Park–Citadelle, Sans-Souci, Ramiers in January 2015. The town of Milot, where these monuments are located, maintains an elementary education system focused on training students for work in the tourism industry. All children attending school are taught the histories of these buildings, and the lessons seem to incorporate literary and historical sources along with local knowledge.

3. Hubert Cole’s 1967 biography remains a principal source concerning Christophe’s life while nevertheless repeating many of the more outlandish legends surrounding his reign. Hubert Cole, *Christophe, King of Haiti* (New York: Viking Press, 1967). The correspondence between Christophe and English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson offers interesting insights; see Earl Leslie Page for their feedback. I thank my colleagues at both venues for their feedback. I thank my colleagues at both venues for their considered analysis that helped me develop a final version of this article and Keith Eggener especially for his patient editing and clarification of the manuscript.


32. Frédérick Mangonès points out that the Citadelle was a hybrid of the Vauban and Montalembert systems of fortification, anticipating the American “Bernard system” that placed ramparted forts along the Atlantic coast of the United States to serve as sea defense while holding the perimeter of coastal territories. Formal similarity between the Citadelle and a Bernard system appears to be purely coincidental, and Mangonès offers a critical caveat to this comparison: whereas the Bernard system was used for coastal defense, the Citadelle was located inland and atop a mountain. Mangonès, “The Citadelle as Site of Haitian Memory.”

33. Deleuze and Guattari understand Vauban’s system as a “state science” that delimited the political aspirations of the “nomad science” of the war machine to the civil and metric rules of control. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 362–63.

34. Langins, Conserving the Enlightenment, 281–324. Langins points out that the declining importance of ramparts is reflected in the change of subtitle from Montalembert’s ninth volume onward, from “Essai sur plusieurs manières de fortifier la ligne droite, le triangle, le quadré & tous les polygones, du qu’s’étendue qu’en soient les côtés, en donnant à leur défense une direction perpendiculaire” to “L’art défensif supérieur à l’offensif, par une nouvelle manière d’employer l’artillerie et par la suppression totale des bastions” (301). I employ Virilio’s notion of the “fleut in being.” Paolo Virilio, Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology (New York: Columbia University, 1986).

35. Deleuze and Guattari discuss this within their vocabulary of deterritorialization and lines of flight. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus.


40. For Leconte, there is a symbolic content in the layout of the grounds. The church, the barracks, and the arsenal form a triangle around the palace, indicating Christophe’s union of moral and military strength. Leconte, Henri Christophe, 340.


44. W. W. Harvey, Sketches of Hayti; from the Expulsion of the French, to the Death of Christophe (London: L. B. Seeley and Son, 1827), vii.

45. Ibid., 134–35.


47. For Leconte, there is a symbolic content in the layout of the grounds. The church, the barracks, and the arsenal form a triangle around the palace, indicating Christophe’s union of moral and military strength. Leconte, Henri Christophe, 340.


52. According to Trouillot, this attribution originated with Jonathan Brown in 1837 and was taken up by Cole in 1967. Trouillot, Silencing the Past, 61–64. Trouillot does, nevertheless, acknowledge some similarity in plan between the two palaces to his admittedly untrained eye.

53. Leconte, Henri Christophe, 335.

54. Mackenzie, Notes on Haiti, 1:164.

55. Césaire, The Tragedy of King Christophe, 17.


57. Carpenter, The Kingdom of This World, 138.

58. Ritter, Naturhistorische Reise nach der westindischen Insel Hayti, 78. This is odd phrasing in that the tense vas has no other conjugation than the third-person singular of vas.


60. See Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 54, no. 3 (Summer 1996), 213–36.


64. Compare, for instance, Ange-Jacques Gabriël’s 1764 Petit Trianon: while each of its four elevations responds uniquely to the particularities of the surrounding gardens, the entire villa remains in a single formal language. Allan Braham, The Architecture of the French Enlightenment (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 42.


67. Consider the empty speech described by Pierre Clastres that seeks to determine a barrier between power and its institution by submitting the chief to


70. Mangonès, La Citadelle, le Palais de Sans Souci, 29.

71. Neslitt comments on the appearance of The Tragedy of King Christophe in the context of the Duvalier regime. Neslitt, Voicing Memory, 141.


76. Carpentier, The Kingdom of This World, 142.