

THE COLOR OF COUNTERREVOLUTION: THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE REBELLION IN SAN DOMINGO

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Victorious rebels rarely maintain their revolutionary fervor after they secure their own ascendancy. So the Americans were hardly remarkable in their departure, after the Peace of Paris, from the principles for which they had battled the British.

From the northern frontier of New England to the southern seaport of Charleston, newly ensconced officials of the states and of the nation crushed uprisings premised on the political ideals of '76. Aspirations to liberty were subordinated to demands for order, local inclinations were overmastered by central imperatives, and legitimate suspicion of power gave way to an insistence upon its prerogatives. Emergent elites proceeded upon values they had once pledge their « lives,... fortunes, and... sacred honor » to oppose¹.

The alterations were everywhere. The counterrevolution advanced on every front. But nowhere – not in the federal Constitution of 1787, not even in the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 – did the abandonment of Revolutionary precepts appear more poignantly than in the realm of race. And nowhere in the realm of race – not in the retreats of the evangelical churches, not even in the notorious three-fifths clause of the Constitution – did the Thermidorean impulse appear more compellingly, and compulsively, than in the American response to the rising of people of color in San Domingo².

The San Domingan revolution is a minor episode at best, now, in the cavalcade of American history. It has been consigned to insignificance

¹ See, e.g., Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1969; David Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1980; Thomas Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution*, Oxford University, New York, 1986; Pauline Maier, « The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1789 », *Perspectives in American History*, 4 (1970), 173-198; Michael Zuckerman, « Thermidor in America: The Aftermath of Independence in the South », *Prospects*, 8 (1983), 349-368.

² A brief note on terminology may be helpful even if my usage is, in the end, arbitrary. The colony I call San Domingo is the colony which the French who held it from 1697 to 1803 called Saint Domingue. It occupied the western third of the island which the aboriginals called Haiti and the Spaniards, following Columbus, named Española, or Hispaniola; the western two-thirds of the island remained in Spanish hands and was called Santo Domingo.

because it does not serve that saga well. But that revolution, and the American reaction to it, were not insignificant at all in their own time, or for decades after. In their practical effects, they altered irrevocably the pattern of American commerce and the direction of American development. In their impact on the imagination, they haunted American minds until at least the Civil War and poisoned American principles far longer than that. As Winthrop Jordan put it.

To trace the spread of Negro rebellion in the New World and to examine American responses to what they saw as a mounting tide of danger is to watch the drastic erosion of the ideology of the American Revolution³.

San Domingo at the end of the eighteenth century was not the squalid, sordid place it became under a succession of appalling dictatorships in subsequent centuries. Or in any case it was not solely so. The island was a charnel house, to be sure, and a gruesome early grave for the great majority of its preponderant population of colored slaves; but it was also a vast mansion of extravagant wealth and indulgence – the « pearl of the Antilles », in the parlance of the time – for its white and mulatto people of privilege. As C.L.R. James said, « On no portion of the globe did its surface in proportion to its dimensions yield so much wealth as the colony of St. Domingo »⁴.

By the outbreak of the French Revolution, San Domingo alone accounted for something between one third and two thirds of France's foreign trade⁵. On a land area less than a sixth the size of Virginia – most of it uncultivable – the colony sustained a slave population more than two-thirds the slave population of the entire United States⁶. With barely, 50,000 free people and those half-million slaves, the colony exported more sugar than all the British colonies taken together, and vast quantities of cotton, tobacco, indigo, and cocoa of the best quality besides⁷. The planters of the San Domingan plains were the world's principal coffee growers, and they made immense amounts of cocoa and rum. Their export and import trades dwarfed those of the far

The Americans from whose perspective I write this essay never did come to any consistent nomenclature. They called the colony which concerns us San Domingo, St. Domingo, and a variety of contractions, expansions, and elaborations of these terms. They rarely called it Saint Domingue. After independence in 1804, the people of the former French colony reclaimed for their own portion of the island the name the natives had once used for its entirety: Haiti. Santo Domingo is now the Dominican Republic.

³ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1968, p. 375.

⁴ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed., rev., Vintage, New York, 1963.

⁵ For estimates of one-third, see Dudwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States 1714-1958*, Duke University, Durham, 1940, p. 5, and Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution 1789-1804*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1973, p. 6. For an estimate of two-thirds, see James, pp. 49-50.

⁶ Montague, pp. 5-6.

⁷ Montague, p. 5; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1964, pp. 122-123; James, pp. 45-46.

more populous American mainland and even exceeded the production of all the colonies of Spain⁸.

San Domingo was « the market of the New World », with « a position of importance unsurpassed in the history of European colonialism ». On its agriculture depended the livelihoods of anywhere from two to six million Frenchmen and the prosperity of entire cities as disparate as Bordeaux and Boston. To its ports, annually, sailed a greater number of ships than plied the trade lane of Marseilles. Its officially registered commerce with France alone was equal to the total trade of the United States with all the world in 1790, and that commerce was merely a fraction of the colony's dealings, licit and illicit, with the Atlantic trading nations⁹.

In 1790, Americans had more than five hundred ships in the San Domingo trade. By some reckonings, France herself had fewer than that¹⁰. In the decade after 1790, despite the devastations of war, the number of American ships regularly sailing in the trade rose to six hundred and more, while the number of French vessels braving the British blockade fell precipitately. Before Jefferson became president, the value of the American exchange with San Domingo was perhaps seven times the value of the French commerce with the island. Before Jefferson imposed his embargo against all American shipping to the black republic, the United States was San Domingo's most important trading partner. And the island was almost equally significant to the United States. With a population of little more than half a million people, ninety percent of them slaves, she stood second only to Great Britain in the foreign commerce of America in 1790, taking at least a tenth of all American exports in that year¹¹.

This vast commerce was the foundation of the prosperity of New England and of the even more abounding success of the Middle Atlantic region. Yankee traders sold « refuse » fish for cheap French molasses which Yankee distillers made into rum; and the rum provided the basis of Yankee trade with the southern colonists, the Indians, the fishermen on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, and the African slavers of Guinea. New York and Pennsylvania grain merchants sold flour for molasses and followed the same cycle. All of them saw the French islands as natural outlets and entrepôts. All of them resisted restrictions on the trade, insisting that their people and their standard of living depended on it. And when the revolution in San Domingo

⁸ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1979, p. 19; Selden Rodman, *Haiti: The Black Republic*, Devin-Adair, New York, 1961, p. 6.

⁹ James, pp. 49-50; Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1988, p. 9; Rayford Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1941, p. 3, 6; Montague, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ Logan, p. 30; Ott, p. 6. On another estimate, France would have had somewhat more ships in the trade than the United States; see James, pp. 49-50. France surely had less by 1797.

¹¹ Logan, p. 60; Ott, p. 142; Nicholls, p. 37; Montague, p. 32.

erupted in 1791 – when the slaves rose in murderous rage against their masters and the flames of the smoldering plantations filled the sky over Cap Français – all of them trembled for the trade as they had never trembled before¹².

The centrality to both societies of the traffic between the mainland ports and the Antillean markets made the danger of its disruption impossible to ignore. But alongside the immense enticements of the West Indian exchange, the United States had other interests to take into consideration.

One such constellation of interests was ideological and, in truth, spiritual. The United States was an outlaw if not an outcast among the nations of the Western world in 1791. It was a democracy in an era still dominated by aristocrats, a republic in an age still ruled by monarchs. Its revolutionary inception made those traditional dynasts intensely uneasy. Its isolation and its awareness of their uneasy animosity made it immensely edgy.

The San Domingan upheaval seemed to some Americans an uncanny echo of their own insurgency against England, and an encouraging portent of the future. The rising that began on that fiery, fateful night of August 22, 1791, was the most unequivocally democratic of all revolutions of that age of democratic revolutions. It mobilized disprivileged and enslaved masses in a remarkable resistance to tyranny. It began by seeking nothing more than a measure of self-determination, a sort of dominion status within a wider French empire, and it ended by achieving an autonomy it had not initially even envisioned, let alone sought. It was impelled to independence with the utmost reluctance, by the recalcitrance of the metropolis itself, and it attached itself as it went to the most elevated ideals of liberty and equality. And it was led almost from first to last by a veritable father of his country, Toussaint L'Ouverture¹³.

In all these ways the San Domingan revolution invited a comparison to which more than a few Americans were not averse. As Winthrop Jordan observed, « Americans had recently been rebels, were noted in the world as such, and knew it ». As a Pennsylvania legislator put it at the time, « It would be inconsistent on the part of a free nation to take measures against a people who had availed themselves of the only means they had to throw off the yoke of the most atrocious slavery; if one treats the insurrection of the negroes as rebellion, what name can be given to that insurrection of Americans which secured their independence? »¹⁴.

But another configuration of interests was material as well as ideological. Most Americans did differentiate between the two insurrections, precisely

¹² Montague, pp. 29-30.

¹³ Roger Buckley, ed., *The Haitian Journal of Lieutenant Howard, York Hussars, 1796-1798*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1985, p. xv; James, passim; Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1979, esp. pp. 88, 90; George Tyson, ed., *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1973.

¹⁴ Jordan, p. 378.

because the West Indian one was an « insurrection of the negroes ». Most Americans, as Jordan also observed, were disinclined to « admit the exactness of the parallel » between their own revolt and that of the blacks. In a world in which they were almost alone in their experiment in republican government, they still did not rush to propose toasts to San Domingo « expressive of our love for our sister republic », as they did for France. In a hemisphere in which they were literally alone, before 1791, in their overthrow of European colonial dominion, they still did not rush to erect equestrian statues of Toussaint, as they did of Washington and as they would of any number of later white Latin American liberators. The triumph of indomitable blacks, even in the very causes they claimed as their own and in which they found their own distinctive identity, did not inspire them to celebration. It filled them with fear and drove them to dread¹⁵.

For them, the rebellion in Hispaniola became the occasion of a repudiation of the very rights for which they had contended a few years earlier. The spectre of race war led southern planters in particular to a hardening antagonism to all discussion of abolition and an augmenting insistence on the incapacity of blacks for civilization. The spectacle of former slaves in seats of power pushed southern politicians to an intensifying exclusion of all who carried the contamination of liberty and of all ideas which they deemed inimical to slavery as well. « It was in the 1790s and the early 1800s that the South began to erect its intellectual blockade against potentially dangerous doctrines »¹⁶.

The rise of a revolutionary republic in San Domingo thus « helped forge an ideology » in America that « differed significantly from the humanistic traditions of Western civilization », in its denial of the humanity of blacks, and that departed decisively from the revolutionary rhetoric of American patriots, in its refusal of the natural rights of Africans in bondage. Terms that were still talismans of enlightenment in San Domingo became tokens of anathema in the American South. At least at the outbreak of the insurrection, southerners admitted refugees from San Domingo as a humanitarian act. From first to last, they excluded revolutionary ideology as an act of self-preservation¹⁷.

That exclusion went beyond extortion of consensus on racial issues and beyond even the rejection of freedom of thought itself in regard to race and all that race reached. It conditioned a more comprehensive southern sense of disquietude. As they never had before 1791, slaveholders saw themselves living « on the edge of a precipice », where « a single false slip » could cause their ruination. The « immense scene of slaughter » in the West Indies obses-

¹⁵ Jordan, p. 378; Charles Biddle, *Autobiography of Charles Biddle, Vice-President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. 1745-1821*, E. Claxton, Philadelphia, 1883, p. 253; Buckley, p. xix.

¹⁶ Hunt, p. 114.

¹⁷ Hunt, pp. 2-3, 107.

sed their thoughts, even as they « came increasingly to feel that slavery was a closed subject, entirely unsuitable for frank discussion »¹⁸.

To avert all allusion to race and the reduction of persons to property, slaveowners and their sympathizers had to collude in a quarantine of the very ideas and ideals upon which they had won their own independence in their own rebellion. They had to abandon the universalistic language with which they had waged their fight for freedom. They had to revert to a particularism which undermined the faith that had animated their endeavor and informed their identity.

In the flood tide of the spirit of '76, Tom Paine insisted that the ethos of the American Revolution was « not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time ». Thomas Jefferson declared certain « truths to be self-evident » and proclaimed « inalienable rights » deriving from « the laws of nature and of nature's God ». And on the eve of the eruption of black militance, almost a decade after the Franco-American triumph at Yorktown, Jefferson looked back on the revolution he and his fellows had wrought and saw that it was good. He took pride in the

thought that, while we are securing the rights of ourselves and our posterity, we are pointing out the way to struggling nations who wish like us to emerge from their tyrannies also¹⁹.

Before the conflagration in the Caribbean, Jefferson and many other American Revolutionaries welcomed the widening of rebellion against oppression. They trusted that their example would prove infectious, and they anticipated eagerly the contagion of liberty. Indeed, they could hardly have done otherwise. As Jordan said,

denial of the universal applicability of natural rights would have deprived their Revolution of its broader meaning and of its claim upon the attention of the world.

Rejection of the generality of rights would have diminished the significance of their achievement and reduced the country it created to a passing provincial aberration²⁰.

Yet by 1797 Jefferson was ready to relinquish such pretensions to world-historical significance sooner than see the principles on which such pretensions rested be a basis for southern slaveowners' vulnerability. « If someth-

¹⁸ Hunt, pp. 107, 111; Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, Harper and Row, New York, 1964, pp. 89-117; Hunt, p. 124; Jordan, p. 384.

¹⁹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, in Philip Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, Citadel, New York, 1945, p. 17; Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*, in Merrill Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, Viking, New York, 1975, p. 235; Jordan, p. 386.

²⁰ Jordan, pp. 386, 387.

ing is not done, and soon done », he warned, « we shall be the murderers of our own children ». The *philosophe* who had contemplated recurrent revolution with equanimity in the dazzling deductions of his correspondence now shrank in revulsion from « the revolutionary storm... sweeping the globe ». The democrat who had descanted on the beneficence of the blood of tyrants as a nutrient for the tree of liberty now trembled that « the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand; and only a single spark is wanting to make that day tomorrow »²¹.

Jefferson was not alone in his retreat from the universalistic promise of the Revolution to the particularistic protections of a less lofty language. Other Americans – especially other white southerners – also abandoned their radical ideology when they saw, in the maelstrom and massacres of San Domingo, its « inherent implications ». And in that attrition of their ideology, there was more than a mere « crystallization » of racial antagonism. There was an ebbing of revolutionary commitment itself. The combustions in the Caribbean « helped produce a novel hesitancy about revolutions in general »²².

Race was at the root of all these ironies. Race drove all these Jeffersonian retreats. Race overrode all other considerations for Jefferson whenever it was salient at all, and race was centrally salient in San Domingo.

None of this should be surprising, of course. Some of the most acute and sensitive scholars of our time, such as Winthrop Jordan and David Brion Davis, have made powerfully apparent the torments that the great Virginian endured in the tension of his « central dilemma »: that « he hated slavery but thought Negroes inferior to white men »²³.

But I want to carry their insights a bit further than they are inclined to do. I want to suggest that Jefferson was, at least functionally, the foremost racist of his era in America. I want to say that he was a man intellectually undone by his negrophobia and that he was ultimately prepared to abandon all else in which he believed – and believed passionately – sooner than surrender his racial repugnances.

In short, I want to argue that Jefferson was not as torn as he is taken to be, even by those who have studied him most acutely and iconoclastically. I want to insist that he was not so confined by his culture as his apologetists have often claimed, and that he was certainly not simply a sufferer of the constraints of his situation. In regard to race as in regard to so much else, he was a leader. He led the southern retreat from the implications of the Revolution he himself rationalized in the Declaration of Independence. And San Domingo constituted the crisis in which all this came clear. San Domingo

²¹ Jordan, p. 386; Jefferson to James Madison, January 30, 1787, in Peterson, pp. 416-417; Jefferson to Williams Stevens Smith, November 13, 1787, in Julian Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Princeton University, Princeton, 1950, XII, pp. 356-357.

²² Jordan, pp. 402, 387. See also Zuckerman.

²³ Jordan, p. 429.

offered the moment of truth when a rhetoric grown ever more evasive and ingenuous became its own reality in the crucible of power.

It is not self-evident that it should have done so. Thomas Jefferson was America's preeminent *philosophe*. His emotional and intellectual investment in his identity as a Revolutionary and as an ardent exponent of the Rights of Man was perhaps the most intense of any American of his generation. He was profoundly conscious of history and of his place in it, and he knew that that place rested upon his country's steadfast persistence in its adherence to its own universalistic principles. Anything less reduced the American Revolution to a mere provincial flare, devoid of world-historical significance. Yet the claims of white pride and the immensity of his aversion to blacks overmastered identity itself for Jefferson.

When the Jacobin revolution first broke upon San Domingo, Jefferson monitored developments on the island with cold clarity. As Secretary of State, he could see a multitude of opportunities to advance America's interests in the insurrection. He anticipated that the planters of the colony would take the occasion of its unsettlement and their own new-found power in the assembly to seek an end to the French Monopoly, and he instructed his agents accordingly to encourage the deputies to demand free trade with the United States. He timed his own payments on the French debt so as to induce the French minister to support this demand. He calibrated the amounts he paid with an exquisite exactitude, affording the French authorities on the island just enough to enable them to resist a British attack but not so much as to arouse undue jealousy in Bordeaux or Paris. He was not above discreet threats, in the name of a « moral law » which licensed trade between neighbors, that if the European powers did not « avoid oppression », their failures of « policy » and « justice » might « tempt » America and San Domingo « to act together ». He was not even above plans for direct American military intervention to protect national interests in the West Indian trade²⁴.

In other words, Jefferson had no difficulty in dealing with San Domingo as long as whites controlled the colony. He could contemplate alliance with the local planters against the metropolis. He could conceive of infringing on French colonial prerogatives and even of risking war for the sake of American commerce with the French Caribbean. He did not hesitate to indulge his penchant for the provocative rhetoric of republicanism, exulting that the small planters – the « patriots » – had gained control of the assembly and dreaming that the great planters – the « aristocrats » – might be deported to the United States and dispersed among the Indians to be educated in liberty and equality²⁵.

Before Toussaint and his black troops seized the San Domingan uprising and made it their own, Jefferson's policies were virtually indistinguishable from Hamilton's. They both planned to take all possible advantage of the

²⁴ Logan, p. 37; Montague, pp. 33-34; Logan, p. 38.

²⁵ Montague, pp. 34-35.

insurgency short of seeing the colony fall into British hands. They both meant to avail themselves of France's difficulties to exact additional commercial privileges for their own countrymen. Jefferson could see past his Francophilia as easily as Hamilton his Anglophilia, before the convolutions of color clouded his vision. It was Jefferson's negrophobia that he could never transcend, or even come to coherent terms with²⁶.

The smoke had barely blackened the sky over Cap Français before Jefferson turned against the San Domingan revolution. The slaves had barely begun their revolt against their masters before Jefferson abandoned all fond thoughts of depositing haughty planters among the Indians to resocialize them to republican manners. The news of the sack of Le Cap « upset all calculations » and « necessitated an entirely new policy ». Confronted with a real revolution rather than an agreeable shift within the elite, the sage of Monticello bent all his sympathy to the planter-fugitives, whose situation suddenly seemed to him to « call... aloud for pity and charity »²⁷.

Just as the swiftness of Jefferson's conversion from contempt to concern for the planters revealed the superficiality of his swipe at their privilege and pride and the depth of his identification with them, so the ease with which he leaped to prognoses of impending cataclysm betrayed the bias of his deepest anxieties. From the day he first learned of the turn of events in San Domingo, he broadcast his conviction that the whites would be utterly expelled from the French West Indies. And since such expulsion never occurred at all in the other French islands and occurred in San Domingo only after a decade of deliberate multiracial development was destroyed by Napoleon's prosecution of race war and Jefferson's own collusion in that course, the Virginian's phobic prophecy tells more of the turn of his own mind than of the actuality of affairs²⁸.

Jefferson was never able to imagine a multiracial society that would endure on a basis of equity. As early as 1783, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he gave voice to his certainty that it was impossible to « retain and incorporate » free blacks « into the state ».

Deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will... produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extinction of one or the other race²⁹.

From these early expressions of his outlook to the last years of his life, Jefferson heard firebells in the night. He was inordinately sensitive to the spectre of slave uprisings because he never doubted the drive of the

²⁶ Logan, p. 39.

²⁷ Logan, p. 38; Montague, pp. 34-35.

²⁸ Montague, pp. 34-35; Tansill, p. 10.

²⁹ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in Peterson, p. 186.

bondsmen to be free. Their « moral sense » was the one consequential element of humanity he allowed them equally with whites, the one point of parity he conceded them amidst their multitudinous inferiorities. He did not believe them capable of delicacy in love or depth in grief – he doubted their capacity for poetry and indeed for reason itself at any pitch comparable to whites – but he did not deceive himself as his southern successors would that blacks were docile or contented with their lot³⁰.

San Domingo's insurrection did not, therefore, surprise him. It simply gave vivid reality to visions of bloody racial vengeance which had long occupied his mind. The cataclysm of color which seemed to him to have overrun the island was the divine rebuke he had long dreaded. As he once confessed, he could only « tremble » when he reflected

that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever: that... a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest³¹.

Even while the French commissioners still commanded the colony, even before Toussaint had seized its scepter, Jefferson declared himself « daily more and more convinced » of the conquest of San Domingo and of « all the West India islands » by « people of color ». He warned his friends that it was « high time » to « foresee the bloody scenes which our children, certainly, and possibly ourselves » would « have to wade through ». He begged his compatriots to « try to avert » such scenes³².

Yet he had no notion how to achieve such an end that was not predicated on policies of racial purification and that did not premise itself on polarization and purge. He could not conceive of any scheme of emancipation in the South that did not then mandate the deportation of the former slaves. The only remotely « practicable plan » he ever projected entailed the exile of an entire generation of black children from their parents, and this project did not particularly perturb the great *philosophe* in his piedmont fastness. He simply pronounced his satisfaction that the plan would reduce the public expense of abolition and the compensation due to the erstwhile owners. His priority on purse over person was worthy of the iciest Federalist. It was also indicative of his readiness to subordinate every other principle by which he lived to his apprehensiveness about race³³.

³⁰ Jordan, pp. 439-440. For the notorious comparisons of blacks and whites, see Jefferson, *Notes*, in Peterson, pp. 186-193.

³¹ Jefferson, *Notes*, in Peterson, p. 215. Jordan observes of this passage that a rare depth of feeling is evident in it, since Jefferson rarely used exclamation points or resorted to miracles without skepticism. See Jordan, pp. 433-434.

³² Charles Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1789-1875: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1938, p. 10.

³³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1975, p. 183.

Even the colonization schemes of his contemporaries envisioned multi-racial societies he could not conjure without revulsion. The earliest plans for the removal of freed blacks to the West Indies – those of the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society and of the *Amis des Noirs* of Cap Français – offered « sanguine hopes that [San Domingo] could become an exemplar for white-black relations in the New World ». And to the time of Jefferson's complicity in the Napoleonic invasion of 1802, such schemes seemed credible. A correspondent could describe « a scene of racial bliss as whites and blacks lived and worked in an integrated society run by a black general and white officials ». Americans, Frenchmen, and San Domingans of that era could all perceive possibilities and actualities on the island in terms other than those of isolation and exclusion³⁴.

Nonetheless, Jefferson persisted in his passion of polarization and his adamant obsession with monoracial resolutions of his apocalyptic anxieties. He believed the Antilles would belong to the blacks as their « permanent home » because he convinced himself that the region « was naturally suited to them ». He even avowed the hope that these « purely negro states » in the tropics would allow blacks a stage for their own social development at the same time that their emigration would rid whites of a dangerous incubus³⁵.

On just those lines of logic, Jefferson could have assisted San Domingo to provide emancipated slaves the sanctuary which both his best beliefs and his worst fears required. He could, indeed, have endorsed its republican revolution as a heaven-sent solution to his ideological dilemma, at once an affirmation of black equality and a practical arrangement for the separation of the race. But he did not seize, or even see, his opportunity. Over the entire period of his presidency, he pressed instead for the devastation and destruction of the black Jacobins. Even as he « grew increasingly silent and depressed about the future of Africans in America », he moved malevolently against them in the Caribbean. Even as he maintained his unyielding « aversion... to the mixture of color » on the continent, he set himself adamantly against a separate black state in the islands³⁶.

Jefferson simply lost his philosophical bearings when he confronted the question of color, or at any rate when he addressed its African aspect. Before the San Domingan insurrection, he displayed a similar debility in the face of another extraordinary opportunity, when the Commonwealth of Virginia was revising its laws. The undertaking was a prodigious one, « aimed at bringing the entire structure of law into conformity with republican principles », and Jefferson played a central part in it. Yet he advanced no measures at all for the amelioration of slavery. He proposed no experiments whatever in emancipation. He meant to continue, essentially unchanged, the

³⁴ Hunt, pp. 164-165.

³⁵ Hunt, pp. 6, 122; Montague, pp. 66-67.

³⁶ Jordan, pp. 470, 467.

vast corpus of the colonial slave system. The only alterations he offered proved, in fact, « too conservative for the legislature to adopt ». The only amendments he could conceive were so harsh – depriving free negroes of all legal protection and dictating the deportation from Virginia of freed slaves and white women bearing mulatto children – that even his fellow planters in the House of Burgesses balked³⁷.

After the San Domingan uprising, when Jefferson was faulted for his inactivity in the cause of emancipation in which he purported to believe, he countered only by counseling his critics to « await with patience the workings of an overruling providence ». It was an extraordinary response, coming as it did from a man who had never followed a course of quietude or fatality in public affairs. He had dared the Declaration against his king, organized the opposition against his president, and hardly hesitated to challenge every other entrenched power he deemed inimical to liberty. Only against slavery did he appear paralyzed in policy and immobilized even in imagination³⁸.

Yet it was in San Domingo, more blatantly and momentously than at any other point in his career, that Jefferson exposed his priority on preserving white power and purity. San Domingo might have been for Jefferson what it was for a host of Haitian intellectuals from its first moments of freedom: a demonstration of black dignity and competence, a refutation of racist theories of African inferiority, and an affirmation of the unity of the divine creation. It Jefferson was as agonized by the discrepancy between Enlightenment ethics and his own quotidian experience as Jordan and others have alleged, the climatic confrontations in Hispaniola in the first years of his presidency offered him an unmatched occasion to vindicate his abstract ideals. He could have hailed the black republicans, fostered their freedom from colonial tyranny, extolled Toussaint, and treated the improbable achievements of the ex-slaves as indisputable proof of a black genius that been stifled before by the brutal constraints of their situation³⁹.

But he did nothing of the sort. So far from celebrating black accomplishments in that more propitious milieu he had always admitted would be essential to a true test of African capacities, he disdained them. So far from cherishing the black republic as a providential incarnation of the very refuge his environmental agnosticism necessitated, he bent his efforts to its enfeeblement. His real revulsion from blacks eclipsed his commitment to equality whenever he descended from pontification to praxis.

³⁷ Jordan, pp. 174-175.

³⁸ Jordan, p. 176. In the waning years of his life, in the Missouri crisis of 1820, Jefferson warned that the « anti-slavery conspiracy » might « force the South to secede ». It was a way of saying that the maintenance of black bondage was sufficiently urgent – not to say sacred – to him to justify the dissolution of the national union. Such bald insistence on the sanctity of slavery seems at first a far cry from Jefferson's separatism in the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798; there the affirmation of state rights was inseparable from the affirmation of civil liberties. But in the perspective of 1820, the possibility presents itself that civil liberties and slavery were indissolubly joined in Jefferson's mind. See Jordan, pp. 174-175.

³⁹ Jordan, p. 429; Nicholls, pp. 41-43.

He was torn between hatred of slavery and conviction of the incapacity of blacks only to the extent that the theory which animated his philosophy « formed a part of his being ». Beyond his « mental enmeshment » in natural rights rhetoric, beyond his infatuation with his own language, his hatred of slavery was always « more abstract than immediate and personal ». It was always attenuated enough that he could let it all go, as he did in San Domingo. If he hated slavery as an actual condition of real men, women, and children, he certainly never so much as said so when the slaves were struggling for liberation. Indeed, he never even hated it enough to withhold his complicity from Napoleon's barbaric effort to reinstate it after those slaves had achieved that liberation. From his early works to his late, over almost half a century, he did not deviate from his racial repugnance. He could not countenance black emancipation in America and he would not recognize the reality of a multiracial society or a black state in the West Indies. He operated in a cul-de-sac of his own creation, and he was resolute in his refusal of any outlet ⁴⁰.

Almost from the moment he assumed the presidency, Jefferson made unmistakable his antipathy to the black Jacobins and his preference for the French. In his first days in office, he announced his intention to recall Edward Stevens from Le Cap in favor of an ageless less partial to the San Domingans and more sympathetic to their nominal metropolitan masters. Soon enough, he did in fact depose Stevens. In place of this « brilliant man » to whom Toussaint « often looked for sage counsel », he put Tobias Lear, « a pedestrian person of modest pretensions » who would do as he was told. Lear's previous public service had been performed for George Washington, and it had involved transporting slaves from Philadelphia back to Virginia before they availed themselves of the freedom to which they were entitled by Pennsylvania law after six months' residence in the Quaker state. Lear had done his tawdry task faithfully for the nation's first president, and his experience as a petty fixer in a racist ruse prepared him appropriately to serve another president in another pretense ⁴¹.

Lear accepted meekly the demotion in the status of his own office which attended Jefferson's transformation of substantive San Domingan policy. Stevens had held a commission as consul-general. Lear could claim no comparable position; he was merely made America's general commercial agent. Jefferson was keen to accommodate France. When the French minister Pichon protested the designation of the American emissary to Toussaint as a consul-general, as if San Domingo were a sovereign society, Jefferson withdrew at once the courtesy which his Federalist predecessor had always accorded the rebels. His abject concession was only the first of a succession of servile

⁴⁰ Jordan, p. 431.

⁴¹ Tansill, p. 78; Logan, p. 113; Tansill, p. 81; Davis, pp. 170-171. Washington himself conceded that the work on which he set Lear was but a « pretext » to « deceive both [the slaves] and the public ».

subordinations of his country's immediate interests to his own design of ingratiating America with the French ⁴².

But Jefferson's Francophilia was never so overweening that it impelled his policy. As much as he meant to placate Pichon, and Talleyrand and Napoleon, he meant much more to distance himself from the black republicans of San Doming. As Pichon reported to Paris in his very first filing, Jefferson and his Secretary of State, James Madison, did not want an independent black government on the island and would not support Toussaint's ambitions of autonomy. As was evident to all by the end of 1801, antipathy ruled American relations with the insurgents. The Department of State permitted « official relations with Santo Domingo to decline to a vanishing point ». In November, Lear himself complained to Madison that there had not been « a single line of intercourse » between Washington and his West Indian post in months; and when Lear did finally hear from his superiors, he received only their disapproval of his ceremonial « address of felicitation » to Toussaint. Jefferson and his administration would not exert themselves even to maintain the most trifling cordiality with the rebel government ⁴³.

Toussaint, with his perennial penetration, divined Jefferson's disdain from the first, and divined its deepest springs as well. When Lear was initially presented to him, the general « complained bitterly » that the new American agent carried no personal letter from the president such as he had been accustomed to receive from John Adams. Lear attempted to excuse the slight, explaining that, by the « custom of the Government », his inconsequential consulship did not warrant such notice. But his explanation was « in vain ». Toussaint caught the insult and its ultimate origin as well, « saying his color was the cause of his being neglected » ⁴⁴.

Color countermanded everything for Jefferson. All the fine philosophy, all the generous sentiment, all the brave enlightenment paled before its power. As he told Pichon in the summer of 1801, he « had no reason to be favorable to Toussaint ». The fact that the black Jacobin leader fought for freedom, self-determination, and a rather more radical version of the Revolutionary republican virtues Jefferson himself had proclaimed in the Declaration counted for nothing — « no reason » — against the blackness that made the man « a menace to two-thirds of the states ». Ideological affinity availed nothing against disparity in skin pigmentation. The similarities in the struggles of the American and San Domingan rebels caused Jefferson not a moment's pause, let alone the deep ambivalence and anguish so often attributed to him by historians. The natural rights philosophy may have

⁴² Tansill, p. 81; Logan, p. 113.

⁴³ Tansill, pp. 80-81, 76, 85, 88, 77.

⁴⁴ Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America during the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, Charles Scribners, New York, 1921; orig. ed. 1889, I, pp. 388-390; Tansill, pp. 82-83.

constituted « the governing aspect of his theology and his science », but he relinquished its ethical injunctions without an apparant pang of conscience so far as they bore on the blacks of Hispaniola ⁴⁵.

Jefferson was not just bent on « reversing the policy » of the Federalists who preceded him. He was actually « entirely willing for France to regain her lost colony » in the Caribbean. The rhetorician who once wanted the tree of liberty refreshed regularly with the blood of tyrants now made common cause with the oppressors themselves. The radical who once swore eternal hostility against every form of tyranny now participated in an impenitent effort to restore slavery itself. The revolutionary who once fought a dire war against imperial exploitation now leagued with Europeans seeking to resurrect a far crueller colonialism. The republican who once resented with unsurpassed eloquence the exactions of executive power now allied himself with a leader of executive energy unparalleled in the history of the modern West. Napoleon was the embodiment of every outlandish Old Whig nightmare about George III. Jefferson had devoted some of the most stirring moments of his public career to denunciations of the dangers of executive aggrandizement. Yet between the Corsican Consul and black Toussaint, Jefferson never hesitated ⁴⁶.

In an early conference with Pichon, Jefferson promised the French minister that the United States government would act in concert with France to restore her supremacy over San Domingo. The Virginian acknowledged that such action would undermine the « extremely important » West Indian trade and « seriously compromise » his administration in public opinion. But such dangers did not deter him. His animus against Toussaint overrode all his « scruples about laying plans for his [enemy's] destruction ». As Jefferson assured Pichon, « nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with everything and to reduce Toussaint to starvation » ⁴⁷.

On the President's promise of assistance, Napoleon concluded an uneasy peace with England and hastened to prepare a West Indian invasion of unprecedented scale, savagery, and duplicity. He put twenty thousand veteran troops under some of his ablest officers and put the entire campaign under the command of his own brother-in-law, General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc ⁴⁸.

« It was the largest expedition that had ever sailed from France », and perhaps the most ill-fated. Within eight weeks, five thousand French soldiers were dead and five thousand more in hospitals, and that was before the yellow fever even began its work. Leclerc wrote desperately for reinforcements, pleading the « mortality of four-fifths of his army and the useless-

⁴⁵ Logan, pp. 120, 80; Jordan, p. 431.

⁴⁶ Tansill, p. 79.

⁴⁷ Carl Lokke, « Jefferson and the Leclerc Expedition », *American Historical Review*, 33 (1928), p. 324; Tansill, pp. 85, 80-81, 87; Logan, p. 120.

⁴⁸ James, pp. 274-275.

ness of the remainder ». In a year, Leclerc was dead and his offensive a failure: of thirty-four thousand troops who had landed on San Domingo by that time, twenty-four thousand were already dead, eight thousand were hospitalized, and barely two thousand exhausted men were still in arms. By the time France finally conceded its defeat, a year of unconscionable carnage after Leclerc's death, she had lost almost all of the sixty thousand soldiers she had shipped from home. The few who remained, at the end of 1803, surrendered to the British sooner than struggle on against the San Domingans and the tropical diseases that decimated them. They would « rot and waste for years in English prisons »⁴⁹.

Napoleon had never dreamed it would end that way. He had always intended a « war to the death », but he had plotted a merciless extermination of the blacks. Depending on deception at the outset, he had instructed Leclerc to promise the San Domingans anything until his troops occupied the strategic sites in the colony. Then, when French forces were impregably fortified, Leclerc was to seek the surrender of all rebels he considered dangerous, and to deport or outlaw them if they did not surrender. Finally, when the local leaders had been removed, Leclerc was to dispense with deviousness and proceed to disarm the population, restore French colonial control, and reinstitute slavery itself, by means of mass arrests, banishment of blacks and even of white women who had « prostituted themselves » to blacks, and mass murder if necessary⁵⁰.

Neither Napoleon nor Leclerc had ever had any illusions about what they were doing. They had only attempted to plant illusion among their antagonists and allies. Leclerc wanted to win the blacks over with proclamations which protected their freedom, but he was willing to destroy them if they were not to be won over. Napoleon personally guaranteed « the freedom of the blacks » in a letter delivered directly to Toussaint by the San Domingan's own sons, but even as Napoleon wrote, he was plotting the perpetual bondage of the blacks and the execution of Toussaint. Even as the black general read the First Consul's unqualified promises, French colonial administrators were giving them the lie by restoring the color line, reopening the slave trade, and reenslaving the black masses in Martinique and Guadeloupe⁵¹.

Toussaint was not deceived for long, if indeed he was ever deceived at all. Once it was clear that the conflict could not be averted, he minced no words in his orders to his officers: « leave nothing white behind you ». Once his dream of a multiracial society was irrevocably aborted by Napoleon's gratuitous promulgation of race war, Toussaint prepared his people to return racist brutality for racist brutality. He only betrayed his humanity by arrang-

⁴⁹ James, pp. 274-275, 323, 343, 355, 369. See also Buckley, pp. xxvii, and Montague, p. 9, for slightly different numbers.

⁵⁰ James, pp. 292-294; Ott, p. 147. For the full text of Napoleon's directives to Leclerc, see Carl Lokke, « The Leclerc Instructions », *Journal of Negro History*, 10 (1925), pp. 88-98.

⁵¹ Ott, pp. 151, 147; Davis, pp. 150-151; James, pp. 340-341.

ing for his own abduction by the French before the full depth of ferocity had been sounded, as if not to have to witness with his own eyes the destruction of the kingdom in the sun he had come so close to creating⁵².

But Jefferson was deceived – or allowed himself to be deceived – to the bitter end and beyond. He was reluctant to reckon with the implications of the intelligence he received from Robert Livingston, his own minister in Paris, and he was disinclined to seek any other reports on Napoleon's plans. « At the moment when national interest depended on prompt and exact information », he « withdrew half his ministers from Europe, and paid little attention to agents he retained ». As a result, he « knew almost nothing » of the Corsican's « character and schemes ». With an ignorance which was a willful as it was profound, Jefferson simply trusted to his own openness and good feeling to overcome animosities that he attributed to Federalist Francophobia⁵³.

When the rumors of the retrocession of Louisiana to France turned to confirmed fact, Jefferson disdained to reconsider his support of French policy. When Livingston wrote from Paris that the French expeditionary force was to proceed to Louisiana once it successfully secured San Domingo, Jefferson simply renewed his instruction to Lear in Cap Français « to do nothing that might offend the French ». When Leclerc expelled Lear from the island for insufficient inoffensiveness, Jefferson accommodated the affront by naming no new agent at all to the post. Even when Leclerc confiscated American cargoes at Le Cap and clapped any American who protested into prison, Jefferson turned a deaf ear to the « widespread indignation » at the general's « high-handed actions ». Though Pichon himself rebuked Leclerc for his insolent exercise of authority, the President assured Pichon that the United States government would recognize Leclerc's regulations « in their full vigor ». The philosophe was prepared to acquiesce in any French outrage rather than impede the effort against Toussaint⁵⁴.

In the heat of the recolonizing campaign, Jefferson lost his purchase on lofty ideals and immediate practicalities alike. Awash in his abhorrence of slaves who had slain their masters, he pursued policies at odds with everything he meant America to mean to the world. The president who had promised « peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none, » was immoderately eager to forge a triple concert

⁵² James, pp. 287-288. The analogy of San Domingo to the multicultural kingdom in the sun of Roger II in Sicily in the 12th century is from Roger Kennedy, *Orders from France*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1989. The interpretation of Toussaint's submission to the transparent ruse by which he was captured and exiled to France to die is my own wistful one, necessitated by the absence of any plausible alternative explanation of his falling into French hands on such a simple ploy when he had slipped or foiled so many sophisticated ones. Not even C.L.R. James, whose wisdom is wondrous in all else, explains the black general's surrender to the treacherous Leclerc in any convincing way.

⁵³ Adams, I, p. 404.

⁵⁴ Adams, I, pp. 404, 405-406; Montague, pp. 42-43; Logan, p. 130; Montague, p. 48; Tansill, p. 90.

with France and England to forestall the emergence of a black nationalism. The president who had promulgated the rule of recognition of *de facto* governments was adamantly opposed to any such acknowledgment of the Antillean republic⁵⁵.

Jefferson saw the significance of recognition clearly enough. He had articulated it himself, as the nation's first secretary of state, in 1792:

We certainly cannot deny to other nations that principle whereon our own government is founded, that every nation has a right to govern itself internally under what forms it pleases, and to change those forms at its own will.

He had enunciated the connection of that precept to his own dearest democratic values: « The only essential thing is, the will of the people ». But he did disregard those « principles », « rights », and « essential things » when they collided with his conceptions of racial relations. As Pichon saw plainly, « the fear which a black government inspires » dictated the President's departure from all other norms he prized⁵⁶.

The same fear that delibitated Jefferson's devotion to his own Enlightened ideals also clouded his assessment of affairs. In the interview in which he promised Pichon American assistance in reducing Toussaint to starvation, he also assured the French minister that England « would doubtless participate » in their « concert to suppress this rebellion ». Ensnared in his own negrophobia, Jefferson simply assumed that others shared it, a grievously mistaken assumption, as events unfolded. England not only declined to cooperate in the expedition but also ended by fighting with the San Domingans against the French. Less than two years after Jefferson's blithe prognostication to Pichon, the British were supplying Dessalines arms and ammunition; by September of 1803 the British fleet was helping to force Rochambeau's retreat from the interior and playing an important part in the capture of several key ports; by November a British blockading squadron was receiving Rochambeau's surrender⁵⁷.

Nothing but color can account for Jefferson's unbudging attachment to a counterrevolutionary enterprise that even the counterrevolutionary British disdained and defeated. Nothing but his own racial revulsion can explain Jefferson's deliberate blindness to the barbarity that the French brought to the Antilles.

Jefferson never did demur at the senseless slaughter, so long as it was directed against the blacks. He never did desist from his endorsement of the endeavor, even as it became a lost cause of mindless savagery.

The President was unperturbed as the war wore on, and Leclerc's men

⁵⁵ Logan, pp. 121, 76-77.

⁵⁶ Logan, pp. 76-77, 126. Jefferson did admit, in 1801, that the blacks in San Domingo were « established into a sovereignty *de facto* » and had « organized themselves under regular laws and government ». See Logan, p. 127.

⁵⁷ Lokke, « Jefferson », p. 325; James, p. 366; Ott, p. 180.

died in droves under the tropic sun, and appeals for supplies from the metropolis went unheeded, and Leclerc resorted to tactics of unblushing terrorism: « Since terror is the sole resource left me, I employ it ». The President was unmoved as Leclerc's « war of extermination » worsened, and so many blacks were drowned in the bay of Cap Français that « for many a long day the people of the district would not eat fish », and 1500 bloodhounds trained to terrorize blacks and tear them apart were imported from Cuba and set loose in an amphitheatre where rich white women in finery watched the dogs disembowel blacks lashed to posts, and the truth became inescapable: the furious killing reflected « not only hatred and fear, but policy »⁵⁸.

Indeed, the President persisted in his punitive onslaught past the period when it was doomed to a phase when it was actually pointless. At the end of 1804, a years after the Consulate had abandoned its expedition in the islands, a year after the new nation of Haiti had proclaimed its independence, he and his party commenced a campaign to cut off all American trade with « the usurped government of that unfortunate island ». One after another, Republican representatives in Congress rose to vent their murderous rage. Long after Francophilia or plausible policy could rationalize such rhetoric, they thundered that the only other republic in the hemisphere had to be « destroyed ». As one of them put it, he « would venture to pledge the treasury of the United States that the negro government should be destroyed »⁵⁹.

Jefferson himself orchestrated the entire endeavor. He professed to do it in order to placate France, and his partisans attempted to follow his lead⁶⁰. But the fact was that France scarcely cared by the time the embargo was instituted in 1806, and neither did the Republicans themselves. Even as Jefferson pushed them to curtail trade ties with the West Indian rebels, Talleyrand was recommending concessions to entice Americans into the trade again. Even as Jefferson lobbied, his minions were thinking other thoughts. As Linda Kerber observed of the debate on the embargo, the Jeffersonian defense of the measure was only ostensibly about trade, profits, and neutral rights; « it kept sliding into the subject of slavery and of whether free Negroes could behave responsibly ». Few doubted that the embargo would damage American commerce, perhaps lastingly. But southern Republicans « seemed unable to stay on the obvious subject ». The only issues that authentically engaged them were the « question of American support for a Negro republic » and the possibility of « helping to suffocate Haiti »⁶¹.

⁵⁸ James, pp. 344, 349, 359-360; Ott, p. 179; Rodman, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Tansill, pp. 104-105.

⁶⁰ Modern historians have followed his lead too. See, e.g., Nicholls, p. 37; Hunt, p. 85; Logan, pp. 176-177. Logan does deplore the « unseemly haste » with which the administration acted, and he does report Madison's admissions that the measure went « beyond the obligations of the United States under the law of nations » and proceeded not « from any rightful requisition on the part of France » but only from the free concession of America.

⁶¹ Tansill, p. 105; Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1970, pp. 47-48. The vendetta continued with

Needless to say, it was not in the national interest to let the lucrative trade of the Indies atrophy. As a result of Jefferson's intransigent antagonism, Toussaint and Dessalines turned to the British, whose merchants came to control the commerce of the Caribbean. Jefferson had once been willing to go to war to keep Great Britain from the very power in the French islands which his own policy now delivered to her by default. But that had been when he was Secretary of State, before his rage to rebuke the black Jacobins overwhelmed his judgment⁶².

By the time he became President, Jefferson had no purchase on any larger notion of the national interest when the provocation of San Domingo intruded. He prostrated American policy before Napoleon's will and Pichon's every wish and whim. He confided indiscreetly in the French minister, countermanding his own secretary of state as he did. He even made the minister – and his masters in Paris – privy to American diplomatic secrets that should have remained strictly confidential. When Pichon asked to see secret instructions to John Adams' minister to San Domingo and confidential accords between Britain and the United States, Jefferson acceded to the Frenchman's extraordinary application and indeed exceeded it. He allowed Pichon to see those « important documents », and he also, « without any hesitation », had the State Department give the papers to Pichon, « who promptly forwarded them to Talleyrand »⁶³.

It was obtuse to American economic interests to take the side of France in the first place. But even within that willed obtuseness, Jefferson showed startling indifference to his opportunities to advance American interests. The Federalists had collaborated with the British in the quasi-war, but the Federalists had neither disdained to drive hard bargains with their allies nor ignored their own needs for the sake of amiable relations with their putative partners. Over the course of the Adams administration, indeed, the United States had actually moved closer to San Domingo than it was to England⁶⁴.

Jefferson was so blinded by the racial aspect of the conflict in the Caribbean that he seems never to have asked his allies any compensation for his unflinching friendship and never to have doubted their own equivalent good will toward him. In fact, Bonaparte bore Jefferson no gratitude and contemplated toward him no reciprocity. His secret instructions to Leclerc commanded his brother-in-law to admit American commerce with San

the extension of the embargo in 1807 and again in 1808. When the ban was finally lifted – upon Madison's ascension to the presidency – American trade did not return. By 1810, United States exports to all the French West Indies amounted to a paltry 2 % of the value of goods sold to Toussaint alone, under Federalist auspices, in 1800. By 1822, Haiti ranked twenty-ninth among nations in trade with the United States. See Montague, p. 47; James Padgett, « Diplomats to Haiti and their Diplomacy », *Journal of Negro History*, 25 (1940), p. 267.

⁶² Tansill, p. 10.

⁶³ Adams, I, pp. 388-390; Lokke, « Jefferson », pp. 323-324; Tansill, p. 88.

⁶⁴ Tansill, pp. 44-45, 55, 58, 64, 73; Logan, pp. 110-111.

Domingo only during the course of the war with Toussaint. Once the colony was firmly under French control, the Americans were to be excluded as they had been before 1791⁶⁵.

Jefferson could not have known the First Consul's mind, of course, but a president less absorbed in his own affections might at least have protected against the possibility that Napoleon was not as ardent for America as Jefferson was for France. A president less blinded by his bigotry might have guessed at Napoleon's malice – as Toussaint and the British did – and taken precautions to safeguard his country's concerns.

Even after the French gave up their grand design of American empire in 1803, Jefferson disdained to make the minimal demands on them that Talleyrand took for granted he would. The Frenchman finally tired, indeed, of waiting for American initiatives and himself prodded Livingston to press for limited trading concessions in Hispaniola. As he reminded the American representative, the French Minister of Marine and Colonies was bound to be receptive to such a request, since the United States could simply recognize the Dessalines' regime and claim unlimited legal commerce with it. But Livingston did not dare to pursue the matter. While Talleyrand was offering him better arguments to advance American interests than his own president was, his president was pushing for the prohibition of all American trade with Haiti and thereby conceding the island's commerce wholly to the British⁶⁶.

The truth was that Jefferson did not want to deal with the black republicans and did not want to define American interests in terms of such dealings. When Dessalines wrote directly to him, declaring a desire to renew trade relations with the United States, describing an abundant crop just harvested, and promising protection to American merchants, Jefferson did not even deign to reply. Not even the notorious Dessalines was as antagonistic to whites as Jefferson was to the blacks of Haiti whose overtures he spurned so incivily. Months after Rochambeau's men quit their campaign, Madison was still assuring Pichon that Jefferson would «do nothing that might injure the rights and dignity of France». Months after Dessalines had made himself the only effective authority among the Haitians, Madison was still fatuously affirming that France was «the sole sovereign of Saint Domingue»⁶⁷.

Indifferent as all this studied indifference and animosity was to the national economic interest, though, it was at least explicable. Trade was never at the

⁶⁵ Tansill, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Tansill, pp. 101-102. The British did not leap to acknowledge Haitian nationhood any more than the Americans did. But the British were more than willing to accept Dessalines' offer of commercial privilege and protection. Their alacrity in resuming and indeed in monopolizing the business of the island only made the Haitians more eager for an American «counterpoise» to the British; and American merchants also «begged Jefferson to give Dessalines some sign of friendship in order that the British might be forestalled». Jefferson ignored all these invitations and importunities. See Logan, p. 148; Montague, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Logan, pp. 148-149.

core of Jefferson's conception of his country, and merchants were never the mainstay of his Republican party. His vision was always westward, away from the Atlantic. His notion of the national interest centered on the creation of a vast yeoman empire, beyond the temptations of Old World commerce and corruption for a thousand generations.

Jefferson's profoundest commitment was to the western country. His preponderant constituency was on the farming frontiers. That commitment and that constituency alike required control of the navigation of the Mississippi. Without it, there would be no way to avert the inroads of urbanization and industrialization, no way to consolidate a continental union, and quite possibly no way to preserve even the present union which was steadily spreading across the Appalachians.

Jefferson knew more than enough about Napoleon's expedition against the San Domingans to appreciate the ways in which it imperiled his intended empire for agrarian liberty. He had rumors of the retrocession of Louisiana to France as early as his inauguration⁶⁸. He had definite intelligence of Napoleon's plan to invade San Domingo and reduce Toussaint by July of 1801. He could have drawn his own conclusions long before Livingston drew them for him at the end of 1801: Leclerc's forces were « destined in the first instance for Hispaniola », but that was only the commencement of the First Consul's colossal design. Leclerc was then « to proceed to Louisiana provided Toussaint makes no opposition »⁶⁹.

It was impossible for Jefferson to be « indifferent to the establishment of Napoleonic power at New Orleans ». Such puissance would endanger the development of the territories beyond the Appalachians and tempt them to forsake their already shaky American allegiance for a French one. It would make Napoleon master of North America, for he would have in the West Indies the most prolific source of colonial staples in the New World and in Louisiana a limitless granary to supply those tropical plantations. It would therefore preempt American expansion and confine the United States forever within its current boundaries. Yet Jefferson « valued the *rapprochement* with France above any American [strategic] interest in » the one place that stood between Napoleon and his North America ambitions, San Domingo⁷⁰.

By the summer of 1801, rumors of the retrocession were so strong that Jefferson and his Secretary of State had to acknowledge them. Nonetheless, their acknowledgment was innocuous to the point of inanity. Madison's instructions to his ministers in Europe were « remarkable for their mildness ». The administration offered « no protest » at all « against a scheme so hostile to the interests of the Union ». If Toussaint and his successors had not detained, defeated, and finally destroyed Leclerc's legions,

⁶⁸ Montague, pp. 41-42. In fact the retrocession had already been accomplished, in the secret treaty of San Ildefonso of October 1, 1800. See Buckley, p. xviii.

⁶⁹ Montague, pp. 41-42; Adams, I, p. 392.

⁷⁰ Montague, pp. 41-42.

ten thousand French soldiers, trained in the school of Hoche and Moreau, and commanded by a future marshal of France, might have occupied New Orleans and St. Louis before Jefferson could have collected a brigade of militia at Nashville ⁷¹.

Jefferson's insensitivity to the precariousness of his position is simply unfathomable apart from his antipathy to black autonomy. America's most vital interests were under imminent siege, and Jefferson did nothing to defend them. If anything, he very nearly saved Napoleon the trouble of staging the assault. He had Madison instruct Livingston to concede the French occupation of New Orleans and try to get West Florida in compensation. He dispatched James Monroe on a special mission with instructions « to admit the French to Louisiana without condition ». As far as Jefferson's orders to Monroe went, Bonaparte

could have satisfied every demand by giving the United States, in the terms of the Spanish treaty, a place of deposit anywhere on the banks of the Mississippi, or by merely allowing American vessels to pass up and down the river ⁷².

The Spanish intendant closed New Orleans to American merchandise, in violation of the treaty of 1795, and restive American frontiersmen became more militant if not mutinous. Tennessee and Kentucky called for war itself, knowing that Morales' action was merely « a foretaste of what they were to expect from the French », and knowing too that a French army fortified on the lower Mississippi would never be dislodged. But Jefferson did nothing that might even have disconcerted Napoleon, let alone deterred him ⁷³.

Western legislatures adopted resolutions demanding that the President be more bold on their behalf.

Eighteen months had passed since the seriousness of Napoleon's schemes had become known to him, but as yet he had done nothing that could be construed as an attempt to represent the demands of the western country; all his ingenuity had, in fact, been exerted to evade these demands.

As Jefferson told Livingston in October of 1802, the French occupation of Louisiana was not, in his estimation, « important enough to risk a breach of peace » with the Bonapartists ⁷⁴.

Since Jefferson declined to defend his own and his nation's deepest, dearest interests, Toussaint and the San Domingans were all that stood between Napoleon and the dismemberment of America. It was as Henry Adams wrote a century ago: Toussaint's « fate placed him at a point where

⁷¹ Adams, I, pp. 405-406.

⁷² Adams, I, pp. 405-406, 442-443.

⁷³ Adams, I, pp. 421-422.

⁷⁴ Adams, I, pp. 431-432, 424-425. A week after Jefferson's confession to Livingstone, New Orleans itself was closed to American commerce; and still Jefferson did « nothing to check Napoleon ». Adams, I, pp. 424-425.

Bonaparte needed absolute control... Before Bonaparte could reach Louisiana he was obliged to crush the power of Toussaint »⁷⁵.

Jefferson and his partisans never « grasped the whole truth » of their dependence on the San Domingans; their pride and prejudice would not allow them to do so. They never saw beyond their scorn, nor ever appreciated that what befell the brave black republic would befall their own. They simply left Toussaint to his own devices, « without a friend or a hope except in himself ». While « two continents looked on with folded arms », guerilla bands of daring, dauntless blacks fought the most formidable military force Europe had seen in more than a millennium⁷⁶.

Few Americans « felt their own dependence on Toussaint's courage », but he held their future in his hands.

If he and his blacks should succumb easily to their fate, the wave of French empire would roll on to Louisiana and sweep far up the Mississippi; if St. Domingo should resist, and succeed in resistance, the recoil would spend its force on Europe, while America would be left to pursue its democratic destiny in peace⁷⁷.

Toussaint did not live to see it, but the troops he had trained and inspired did resist Napoleon's juggernaut and did deny it the success on which the rest of the French colonial design rested. In Adams' words once more,

The colonial system of France centered in St. Domingo. Without that island the system had hands, feet, and even a head, but no body. Of what use was Louisiana, when France had clearly lost the main colony which Louisiana was meant to feed and fortify?⁷⁸

Napoleon could read handwriting on the wall as well as any man. When Leclerc could not subjugate the blacks of San Domingo, Napoleon began to recalculate the costs and benefits of a colony in Louisiana. Louisiana was inseparable from the West Indies in his design. He had lost the lushest and most lucrative island in the West Indies, and within a matter of months he decided to dispose of Louisiana.

It was the richest irony of an episode redolent with rich ironies. Jefferson had, by his encouragement of the Caribbean campaign, inadvertently made New Orleans and the Louisiana country more attractive to France than they had ever been before. Driven by his detestation of blacks who sought the same freedoms he did, he had aroused the one man in Europe audacious enough to take over the one part of America which was absolutely indispensable to his own agrarian ambitions. Ruled by his racial antipathies, he had left the very blacks he loathed to do the work of defending the vital

⁷⁵ Adams, I, p. 378.

⁷⁶ Adams, I, pp. 390-391.

⁷⁷ Adams, I, pp. 390-391.

⁷⁸ Adams, I, p. 25.

interests that he declined to defend himself. It was to those nameless, numberless blacks and their incalculable bravery and sacrifice that he owed his ability to hold his constituents and his country together. It was to Toussaint L'Ouverture – his literal *bête noire* – that he owed the crowning accomplishment of his presidency and the monumental legacy for freedom which he left America, the Louisiana Purchase.