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The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution

The Haitian Revolution (1789–1804) was an epochal event that galvanized slaves and terrified planters throughout the Atlantic world. Rather than view this tumultuous period solely as a radical rupture with slavery, Malick W. Ghachem's innovative study shows that emancipation in Haiti was also a long-term product of its colonial legal history. The key to this interpretation lies in the Code Noir, the law that regulated master-slave relations in the French empire. The Code's rules for the freeing and punishment of slaves were at the center of intense eighteenth-century debates over the threats that masters – not just freedmen and slaves – posed to the plantation order. Ghachem takes us deep into this volatile colonial past, digging beyond the letter of the law and vividly reenacting such episodes as the extraordinary prosecution of a master for torturing and killing his slaves. This book brings us face to face with the revolutionary invocation of Old Regime law by administrators seeking stability, but also by free people of color and slaves demanding citizenship and an end to brutality. The result is a subtle yet dramatic portrait of the strategic stakes of colonial governance in the land that would become Haiti.

Malick W. Ghachem is associate professor of law at the University of Maine School of Law. A historian and lawyer, he has held a Chateaubriand Fellowship from the French government; a senior fellowship at the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University; and the Charles Hamilton Houston Fellowship in Law Teaching at Harvard Law School. His articles and reviews have appeared in *Law and History Review*, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, and *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
 Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
 32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521545310

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First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Ghachem, Malick W. (Malick Walid)

The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution / Malick W. Ghachem.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-83680-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-54531-0 (paperback)

1. Law – Haiti – History. 2. Haiti – Politics and government – 1791–1804.

3. France. Code noir. I. Title.

KGS294.G48 2012

349.7294-dc23 2011038739

ISBN 978-0-521-83680-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-54531-0 Paperback

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Acknowledgments

I had the idea for this book long before I knew what form its argument would ultimately take and where its narrative thread would lead. I am deeply grateful for the patience and encouragement of those who kept me at the task when other demands – most notably, those of the clients I served for about five years in the practice of law – forced me to put this work aside. Frank Smith took this book on at Cambridge University Press, and Eric Crahan took it over after Frank assumed the directorship of the press's New York office. I thank Frank and Eric for standing by with such forbearance and equanimity while I sought to shape and then reshape the contours of the manuscript until it became the book I had envisioned.

That it now appears in this form is due in very large measure to my friend and colleague Rebecca Scott, whose learning and counsel have been major blessings in my intellectual life. Rebecca generously read and commented on nearly every part of this book and was entirely indispensable to my ability to see it through to completion, even as she worked to finish her own study that travels through some of these same waters. Her sheer enthusiasm for legal-historical scholarship and her determination to recover lost stories of slavery and emancipation repeatedly reinforced me during some of my most trying moments with this endeavor. I could write whole paragraphs about everything else she has done to improve the final product, but I will content myself by saying simply: Thank you, Rebecca, for bringing me back to what I had started.

Laurent Dubois has brought tremendous energy and insight to the field of Haitian history; my debts to him are particularly great. The sharp critiques of two anonymous readers of an earlier version of this

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manuscript – one of whom I believe I have just thanked – were indispensable. Chris Desan’s perceptive reading of the introduction helped me clear some of my last remaining hurdles, and I am enormously thankful for her many other acts of support during the preparation of this work. Vince Brown’s gentle impatience to see this book between covers was heartening.

This book began life as a dissertation at Stanford University, and the three scholars who served on my thesis committee, Keith Baker, Jack Rakove, and Peter Sahlins, deserve special mention. Keith Baker’s brilliance made Tocqueville’s vision of French history come alive for me, and motivated me to rethink that vision in the context of the Haitian experience. To work with him was one of the great privileges of my academic career, which he has done much to advance. Jack Rakove’s superb example in the field of American revolutionary history has also been vitally important to me; I am particularly indebted to him for sacrificing time during a sabbatical year to comment on my thesis (and for lugging the cumbersome text all the way to Eastern Europe and back). Peter Sahlins warmly welcomed an interloper to his wonderful seminar on the legal history of early modern France at the University of California at Berkeley, where I first began exploring in depth the material that forms the basis of this book. I remember the fresh excitement and intensity of those seminar meetings, to which my colleague Gillian Weiss introduced me. My long-time friend and mentor Dan Gordon read the completed dissertation and helped me imagine how its argument might be developed into a book.

At various stages in the preparation of this work, I received generous fellowship support from the following sources: the Stanford University Department of History, the John Carter Brown Library, the French government’s Chateaubriand Fellowship program, the International Center for Jefferson Studies (funded by the Coca-Cola Company), the Stanford Humanities Center, the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, the Charles Hamilton Houston Fellowship at Harvard Law School, and the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale. For this support, and for associated acts of kindness undertaken while I worked under the aegis of these institutions, I thank Norman Fiering, Karen DeMaria, Dany Gentilt, Michel Troper, Jim Horn, Peter Onuf, Joe Miller, Jim Caesar, Theodore and Frances Geballe, Peter Stansky, Susie Dunn, Susan Sebbard, Gwen Lorraine, Debra Pounds, Rania Hegazi, Randall Kennedy, Robert Clark, Morton Horwitz, Ellen Adolph, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Karen Dalton,

Cambridge University Press

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David Brion Davis, and Rob Forbes. I miss my friend Lara Moore, whose example and sense of purpose remain with me.

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of archivists and librarians at the following institutions: in France, the Archives nationales d'outre-mer, the Archives nationales, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, the Bibliothèque Cujas, the Bibliothèque de l'Ordre des Avocats (particularly Yves Ozanam); in Haiti, the Bibliothèque haïtienne des Pères du Saint-Esprit (where Patrick Tardieu was my host); and in the United States, the John Carter Brown Library (especially Lynne Harrell and Susan Danforth), Stanford's Green Library (where thanks are due to Sonia Moss, Mary Munill, Mary Jane Parrine, and the staff of the Department of Special Collections), and Harvard's Widener Library.

Along the way, I presented bits and pieces of this project at various conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, and presentations, of which I must single out several highly congenial and inspiring rounds of Bernard Bailyn's Atlantic History Seminar at Harvard. For their feedback and presence at these gatherings, and for other assorted odds and ends, I thank Bernard Bailyn, Pat Denault, Ed Cox, Ron Hoffman, Philip Morgan, Robert Gross, Fredrika Teute, Ron Schechter, Richard Dunn, John Smolenski, Michael Zuckerman, Sally Gordon, Aron Rodrigue, Karen Offen, Julie Saville, Max Edelson, Randy Sparks, Rosemary Brana-Shute, John Garrigus, Seymour Drescher, Hubert Gerbeau, Lou Roberts, Colin Jones, James Sheehan, Tim Brown, Richard Ross, William Forbath, Amy Upgren, John Wirth, Sheryl Kroen, David Bell, Joyce Chaplin, Paul Robinson, Sarah Sussman, Brian Vick, Ken Moss, Gillian Weiss, Amalia Kessler, Walter Johnson, Emma Rothschild, David Todd, Mary Lewis, Morton Horwitz, and Alan Dershowitz. A colloquium marking the 200th anniversary of the death of Toussaint Louverture, held in Port-au-Prince in 2003, taught me to appreciate the significance of the Haitian Revolution for contemporary Haitians; thank you to Carole Berotte Joseph and Marie Lourdes Elgirus for that memorable occasion. I twice presented draft sections of this book at the University of Michigan Law School. For those rewarding experiences and the insights that flowed from them, I thank Rebecca Scott and the students in her "Law in Slavery and Freedom" seminar, Martha Jones, Jean Hébrard, Tom Green, Bill Novak, and the students in the Green/Novak legal history colloquium. A version of Chapter 4 appeared in the November 2011 issue of *Law and History Review* by permission of Cambridge University Press.

Within the community of slavery and Haitian revolutionary studies, I must acknowledge a special debt to David Brion Davis, whose profound and searching commitment to this field of history has been important to me for more than a decade. David Geggus bestowed on me the benefits of his vast erudition on numerous occasions; his assistance in matters large and small over the years is much appreciated. Jeremy Popkin, Alyssa Sepinwall, Domingue Rogers, Miranda Spieler, John Garrigus, and Louis Sala-Molins answered my calls for help when I sounded them and generously shared their work with me. I have also learned a great deal from Gene Ogle's incisive writings on Saint-Domingue.

At the University of Maine School of Law, deans Peter Pitegoff, Jenny Wriggins, and Chris Knott were solicitous of my needs beyond the call of duty. Christine Hepler generously helped to obtain permissions for the various images that appear in this book. Sherry McCall answered my seemingly endless requests for interlibrary loan materials with unfailing good cheer and resourcefulness. Fran Smith's patient and kind soul kept me from discombobulating when this work overlapped with a hectic transition to law teaching.

Years ago, I saw a reproduction of the great Haitian artist Ernst Prophète's wonderful painting of the Haitian declaration of independence, and it has remained in my mind ever since. Heartfelt thanks to Ernst, Jack Rosenthal, and Holly Russell for permission to use the image that appears on this book's cover, and to David Fechheimer for enabling me to reach its creator. I am grateful as well to Abby Zorbaugh and Aishwarya Daksinamoorthy for help with the production process and to John McWilliams for his copyediting. Christine Hoskin prepared a superb index.

My parents, Said and Khedija Ghachem, made many sacrifices for my education and raised me with an openness to the world beyond that enabled me to follow my interests where they led. This book is also the product of their faith and efforts. My four siblings – Sofia, Samy, Karim, and Leila – stepped into roles that needed filling when our separate boats started to drift apart; they assisted me in staying the course. June Cargile and Lori James were unstinting in their support of my family; Kieren James-Lubin helped me prepare for new responsibilities.

My wise and brilliant wife, Erica James, gave me the time I needed to bring this project to a close. But her contributions have been much more extensive than this. A Haiti scholar herself, she has been asking me good questions about this book since the day I first met her – a most fortuitous encounter prompted, as it happens, by the almost certainly unfounded

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suspicion that I was trying to recall all of the Haitian history books she had checked out at the local library. (How we got from there to our wedding day is a long and somewhat contested but nonetheless romantic affair.) Her own perseverance and drive to make sense of Haiti's troubles were an inspiration to me, as well as a humbling reminder of what suffering and courage still obtain in the contemporary world. More than anyone, she persuaded me that I had a story worth telling here and, through her love and compassion, helped me to bring it to fruition.

This book is dedicated to Faisal and Ayanna, my two beloved and exuberant children. I hope that in reading it someday, they will recall that their story, too, travels through Haiti.

*North Hampton, New Hampshire
June 2011*

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