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978-1-009-25615-5 — Rituals, Runaways, and the Haitian Revolution
Crystal Nicole Eddins
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Introduction

> . . .Come eat this food
> Rada, Mondongue, Don Petro, Mussondi, Ammine
> Come, come and eat this food,
> Motokolo, the earth is shaking, where are you?

This song excerpt from the Haitian Vodou religious tradition recites a roll call for the *lwa* (spirits) from various African ethnic groups to gather, partake in offerings, and be recognized during a ceremony.[1] In Vodou, the *lwa* are divided into *nanchons* representing the African "nations"; however, in the song above, we see a coming together of culturally and regionally disparate spirits – the Rada (Arada) from the Bight of Benin, Mondongues and Moussondis of West Central Africa, and the Ammine (Mina), who originated from areas between the Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast. This assembly of distinct African *lwa* is an instructive lens through which we can interrogate the historical nature of interactions and relationships between diverse enslaved Africans of colonial Haiti, then called Saint-Domingue. Though divided by their geographic, religious, cultural, and linguistic origins, enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue shared in the experience of forced migration and subjugation under a violent, repressive colonial regime. African captives were the majority of Saint-Domingue's enslaved population; they retained consciousness about and historical memory of polities, economies, and social structures that existed on the African continent since many were victims or veterans of political and religious coups, civil wars, and inter-state military conflicts that were directly and indirectly connected to the trans-Atlantic slave

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trade (Thornton 1991). Africans struggled to re-create themselves and re-create home in the Americas by relying on their knowledge bases to make sense of their circumstances and build solidarity with each other to ensure survival.

Solidarity initially formed among the enslaved population during the Middle Passage, then during "seasoning" process of introducing new African captives to the plantation system. The collective need for enslaved people to survive the material conditions of plantation society required enculturation into the structure of expected norms and behaviors, while at the same time offering one another protection from retribution for small transgressions against the labor system (Casimir 2001, 2015). Their micro-level interactions with each other in the colony helped to cultivate, over time, an accumulated sense of collective consciousness, solidarity and relationship networks, and power to organize resistance against subjugation (Lovejoy 1997). Aradas, Mondongues, Minas, and the multitude of other African captives who survived the Middle Passage indelibly shaped the colony's landscape economically through their involuntary labor value; socially with their network relationships, cultural productions, and sacred practices; and politically through the articulation of political expressions from the African continent that re-emerged as resistance, revolts, marronnage and fugitive slave communities, and the Haitian Revolution.

The central argument of *Rituals, Runaways, and the Haitian Revolution: Collective Action in the African Diaspora* is that the web of networks between African and creole runaways, those who were enslaved, and a small number of free people of color built through rituals and marronnage was a key aspect to building an emerging sense of racial solidarity that helped make the Haitian Revolution successful. Shared African ethnic identity among the "Kongo," "Rada," and "Nagô" insurgent bands was important for facilitating trust through common language, political ideologies, or religious orientation. However, this book also brings attention to racial solidarity – cooperation among individuals beyond their cultural, linguistic, or political boundaries – as a strategically important aspect of collective consciousness. I explicate collective consciousness, and racial solidarity, by exploring the complicated relationships between groups previously believed to be politically and socially opposed or uncooperative. False dichotomies between slaves and runaway maroons; Africans and creoles; and short-term *petit* and permanent *grand* maroons are linked to the earliest enslaved blacks present on the island. When Hispanicized black *ladinos* escaped slavery soon after their early sixteenth-century arrival, Spanish colonists cast them as wild beasts

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or *cimarróns*. Colonists preferred continent-born Africans, who they called *bozales*, and perceived them as more docile than *ladinos* due to the lack of exposure to European lifeways – only for African Wolofs to stage the island's first black-led revolt in 1521. Recent scholarship suggests the Spanish colonial definition of *cimarrón* conceals the Taíno origins of the term *simaran*, which signifies the ongoing action of an arrow in flight and perhaps symbolizes "the intentionality of . . . enslaved or colonized people extricating themselves from conditions of oppression."[2] The black *ladinos* and African *bozales* who labored alongside the Taíno in Spanish mines and on sugar plantations, and collaborated with them in marronnage and rebellions, likely would have adopted the Taíno understanding of the term *cimarrón*, engendering a solidarity-based tradition of resistance. Yet, colonial histories and memory of resistance in colonial Haiti continue to inform conceptions of an inherent binary between the *ladino* or creole versus the African *bozale*, the runaway maroon versus the slave, and free and unfree. These erroneous presumptions about the nature of black people's claim-staking to freedom and the relationships between these categories deserve correction. By problematizing these dichotomized categories of human actors, this book presents a broader conceptualization of participation in resistance activity that pushes us beyond silences around and disavowals of enslaved people's social and political agency (Trouillot 1995), and centers collective actions as the source of structural transformations.

It is important to provide nuance to the process by which racial solidarity developed, especially in such a highly stratified colonial society as Saint-Domingue. Racial solidarity between enslaved creoles and Africans was largely situational, but as the 1791 uprising and war for independence unfolded, it was the liberation impulses generated from maroons and African rebels that pushed creole leadership to take a collective stance against white control of the nation. Solidarity was also constructed through the interactive processes involved in marronnage, which was considered an egregious offense because runaways' self-defined freedom entailed a counteraction to the logic of racial slavery and disrupted plantation work gangs' labor output. After a person or a group of people set off as fugitives, those who remained on plantations safeguarded the missing runaway by concealing their absence; conversely, runaways at times hid on plantations and took shelter in bondspeople's housing quarters. Most maroons were continent-born Africans who often escaped with members of their ethnic group, but there were situations in which it was more beneficial to flee with others. People from various

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backgrounds and experiences within the plantation system could bring together a wider range of knowledge, resources, and skills that could aid in escape and rebellion. For example, there was significant ethnic diversity on southwestern Saint-Domingue plantations, including enslaved people trafficked from Jamaica, meaning there was likely a heterogeneous resistance mounted by the Platons maroon kingdom against French incursions in 1792.[3] When Toussaint Louverture enacted strict labor codes that resembled slavery during his tenure as colonial leader and governor, many of the newly emancipated cultivators constantly rebelled and escaped plantations as maroons to send the message that forced labor would not be tolerated under any circumstances. Finally, it was largely continent-born Africans and maroons who led the resistance against Napoleon Bonaparte's army in 1802, forcing mobilization toward independence.

The rebels' resistance was not limited to military fighting, but they also resisted the prevailing Atlantic world economic order by creating what Haitian sociologist Jean Casimir (2001, 2015, 2020) calls the "counter-plantation" system of family landownership networks, subsistence farming, and the proliferation of Vodou – all of which were the foundation of the country's sense of popular sovereignty in the independence era. These ontological shifts and collective efforts "from below" negated white-dominated capitalist structures and demanded the reconceptualization of freedom, citizenship, property, and identity on a wider scale. Aspects of the counter-plantation logic have antecedents in the colonial era: participation in the sacred rituals that eventually coalesced into Vodou and micro-level "sociogenic" marronnage were "shaped by cognition, metaphysics, egalitarianism, hope for refuge, and the experiences of the masses" and were grounded in various African ethnic sensibilities. These practices made possible "sovereign" marronnage, the macro-level project of emancipation and nation-building during the Haitian Revolution, which was in part shaped by an emerging racial identity that was a necessary component to contesting the inherent contradictions of white supremacy and Enlightenment ideals (Roberts 2015: 117, chapter 3). Once the 1805 Haitian Constitution was ratified, it explicitly stated that all of the nation's citizens would be generally regarded as black people.[4] The Haitian revolutionaries had subverted colonial era norms and policies that enslaved and oppressed individuals according to race, birth origin, skin color, or status, and affirmed blackness as their singular national and racial identity.

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Slavery in Saint-Domingue was codified into law by the *Code Noir*, which attempted to constrain the lives of bondspeople in nearly every imaginable way. Though planters and enslaved people alike oftentimes ignored the *Code Noir*, it dictated that Africans and their descendants would be baptized as Christians, it prohibited the enslaved from bearing arms or buying and selling items at market, and it forbade them from participating in any civil or criminal matters. The *Code Noir* did not officially recognize marriages between enslaved people and determined children's slave status according to that of the mother, meaning parents had no reproductive rights over their children or immediate familial networks. One way to mediate these social controls, or to disavow them altogether, was through marronnage. Whether they were seeking to permanently escape – *grand* marronnage – or needed a brief respite from the brutal plantation regime – *petit* marronnage – runaways relied on knowledge, tools, resources, and relationships within their immediate grasp to facilitate their escape. Marronnage afforded a flexibility of movement, familiarity with landscape, and the maintenance or construction of social ties between maroons, slaves, and free people that in some ways diminished the differences between these categories of social actors – especially in the face of increasing racial discrimination and repression. These groups were often in contact, and individuals could move between the states of being in marronnage, slavery, and freedom at different points of their lives; it was not impossible for an enslaved person to become a maroon, return to slavery, then become legally free. For example, recent research suggests Toussaint Louverture did just that, escaping temporarily on more than one occasion during his youth then eventually earning his freedom decades before the Haitian Revolution. Jean-François Papillon, and his romantic partner Charlotte, had been a fugitive at the time of the northern plain uprising for three years.[5] We may never know whom they encountered, what they discussed, or if they were aware of events occurring in France and the implications for Saint-Domingue. But we can speculate, as this book will in later chapters, that Jean-François, Charlotte, and many others used marronnage to cultivate relationships that would help them to organize the revolt. To be clear, this book is not attempting to assert that the masses of insurrectionists were maroons, a claim that has been debated enough. However, many maroons hid in plain sight and were often indistinguishable from those who were enslaved; therefore, maroons conceivably were present and participatory in the revolution. The influence of marronnage on the Haitian

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revolutionaries was also exemplified when the "indigenous" army under Jean-Jacques Dessalines named the newly independent country "Haiti," reclaiming the island's original name *Ayiti* from the Taínos, who, along with enslaved Africans, were arguably the first maroons of the Atlantic world.

Marronnage itself can be considered, in general terms, as an act and process of reclamation and redirection. When enslaved people moved about, voluntarily walking or running away from plantations, they not only made internal decisions regarding their reasons for leaving, or to where and with whom they would escape; runaways were reclaiming parts of their lives that enslavers intended to wholly control and own. Enslavers extracted labor value and wealth from enslaved people, but they also looked to extract intangible aspects of enslaved people's consciousness and identity, including their cultural connections to a homeland; time and energy; sense of self and dignity; power and self-control; social relationships; and usage of land and resources. Uncovering the ways maroons exhibited collective consciousness through acts of reclamation and redirection, especially considering they did not leave behind writings of their own, requires an inter- or multi-disciplinary approach that can help interpret archival data sources in unconventional ways. Jean Fouchard's (1972) *The Haitian Maroons*, Carolyn Fick's (1990) *The Making of Haiti*, and Michael Gomez's (1995) *Exchanging Our Country Marks* provide methodological insights and models for subversively reading marronnage and runaway slave advertisements as a lens through which to understand identity and cultural dynamics, as well as collective action, among enslaved populations. The present study employs protest event content analysis (Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Hutter 2014) of the thousands of fugitive advertisements originally published in Saint-Domingue's newspapers, primarily *Les Affiches américaines*, and draws on insights from Black/African Diaspora Studies[6] and the sociology of social movements to unveil hints and clues about escapees' innermost worlds. Rather than accept the conditions of enslavement that prescribed social death and alienation for racialized chattel laborers, maroons and their actions during flight initiated significant changes in their daily lived experiences.

This book offers a look at how, where, when, and with whom African women, men, and children collectively resisted enslavement before the Haitian Revolution, giving us a deeper knowledge of the patterns of resistance that contributed to the Revolution. Additionally, our understanding of marronnage as an anti-colonial, anti-slavery political project elevates

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when we study Haiti from a *longue-durée* perspective, since the island already had a significant population of self-liberated black people by the early seventeenth century. The onset of French colonization required the suppression and incorporation of maroons and enslaved captives alike into the sugar plantation economy; but just as the Spanish conquest of the island's black population through sugar slavery failed, so would the French – the Haitian Revolution of 1791 being an astounding success of black resistance against empire. A significant aim of this work is to go beyond quantifying marronnage toward comprehending the relationships that it created, and the potentiality of the tangible and intangible resources shared through those connections. I analyze variables induced from *Les Affiches* advertisements in a temporal fashion to illuminate how structural factors shaped, or were shaped by, maroons' and rebel slaves' micro-level actions. Maroons' actions reclaimed their identities, energy, and effort from behaviors that benefitted the plantocracy and redirected them toward their individual, familial, or collective interests and needs. They sought to maintain and create family ties by escaping with their children, with their countrywomen and men, or with people of other ethnic groups; and they visited or hid with free or enslaved family members and loved ones. They assumed African surnames or nicknames, or used their artisanal and language skills to forge documents and present themselves as free persons. Runaways armed themselves with guns, machetes, and other weapons to protect themselves from the *maréchaussée* (fugitive slave police) and to sack planters' properties in search of needed resources like food and clothing. They carved out geographic spaces for maroon settlements within the colony, and at times fled Saint-Domingue altogether to find refuge in the neighboring Spanish colony of Santo Domingo. These indications of behavior, reclamation of social and human capital, and knowledge of the colonial landspace are embedded in the advertisements and, when aggregated over time, they can exhibit evidence of collective consciousness, patterns of collective responses to social conditions, and the seeds of what would become the Black Radical Tradition.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION, REVOLUTIONS, AND THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION

Collective action is any activity that brings people together for a common purpose, usually to solve a social problem (Oliver 2013). Collective consciousness is a foundational aspect of collective action because it

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heightens understanding of the reasons for taking part in protest activities. Shared consciousness requires both comprehension of injustices and inequalities within a material context, and having common interests with others who share positionality. Through interactive processes, social movement actors raise consciousness and construct forms of resistance befitting their context or situation (Snow and Lessor 2013). Consciousness has been the subject of sociological study since early theorists examined the impact of industrialism and modernity on patterns of relations in human communities. Marx and Engels' *German Ideology* ([1846] 2001) defined shared consciousness as a world of ideas and conceptions that emerged from, and was conditioned by, proletarian workers' common relation to capitalist modes of production. With greater inequality, class consciousness would heighten and eventually lead the working class to overthrow the bourgeoisie in a social revolution. Émile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) argued that shared ritual behavior enhanced a shared sense of effervescent emotions among participants. Decades later, in *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson ([1963] 1980) extended Marx's definition to show how class consciousness not only arises from tense interactive processes between groups of opposed interests, but is also embedded in workers' traditions, values, and institutions. Subsequent cultural studies (Swidler 1986; Hall 1990; Kane 2000) and social movement studies (Fantasia 1988; Steinberg 1999) relied on these 'traditional' conceptions of consciousness; but sociology largely ignored the work of W. E. B. Du Bois and his consideration of other variables, primarily race, as the basis for Black[7] people's consciousness, agency, and strivings for freedom (Du Bois [1903] 1994; Morris 2007).

Sociological omission of theorizing about racial inequality, slavery, and legacies of colonialism date to the earliest work on consciousness and revolution. Cedric J. Robinson's (1983) *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* turned Marxist analysis of social movements on its head by re-assessing the development of industrial capitalism and working-class consciousness in Europe. Robinson asserts that Marx and Engels, and later E. P. Thompson, did not fully recognize ethnic, cultural, and political heterogeneity in early modern Europe, specifically overlooking the contributions of Irish migrant workers in English labor organizing efforts. This unification between the English and Irish did not last, however, resulting in the separation of "the races" and the rise of English nationalism. England's colonial dominance over Ireland engendered long-standing racial chauvinism toward the Irish from English elites, which was further inflamed among the working classes by the

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presence of low-wage Irish workers in England. Marx's and Thompson's incorrect assumption that the English proletariat was a cohesive group based on class entailed a failure to acknowledge the interconnectedness of racial (or proto-racial) identity, legacies of colonization, and class-based identity within contestations to capitalist formations, laying the foundation for later theorizing about collective consciousness and social movements being ill-equipped to comprehend the complexity of black mobilizations.

The origins of the Black Radical Tradition call for bringing more attention to the fundamental significance of enslaved African labor in the development of industrial capitalism, and an understanding of the deeply transformational nature of Black mobilizations in contrast to industrial wage earners or agrarian peasants that are typically considered the vanguard in revolutionary successes against dominant-class landlords. Theda Skocpol's 1979 *States & Social Revolutions* focused on peasantries in France, Russia, and China, and defined peasants as agricultural cultivators alienated from claims to their production – but not necessarily alienated from claims to wages or land. Peasants paid taxes and rents, and according to Skocpol, peasant families in rentier agrarian systems who possessed and worked their own land were particularly inclined to rebel (1979: 116). On the other hand, enslaved people were alienated from their labor value and products, as well as any claim to wages, land, citizenship, and at the most basic level, ownership of themselves. In addition to the surplus labor value that enslaved African workers generated, having been bought and sold as commodities they themselves were the foremost form of capital in the Atlantic world. When enslaved people committed marronnage, they were in effect "stealing back" themselves and their labor value, rejecting the commodification and enslavement they faced and re-humanizing themselves through various forms of expression (Wynter n.d.: 72–74). Marronnage and overt rebellions recovered enslaved people from a life of social death: complete isolation from one's own social, cultural, religious, economic, and political networks (Patterson 1982). Maroons fled in groups, sought out family members who were free – attempting to restore linkages broken by domestic slave trades – and attempted to live life, precarious as it may have been, on their own terms.

Robinson (1983: chapter 7) points out that the nature of the Black Radical Tradition, particularly African-led slave rebellions, was grounded in the worldviews that bondspeople carried with them from the continent. Enslaved people's expression of the tradition was often articulated

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through spiritual, cultural, and metaphysical idioms and stood in complete opposition to their position as chattel slaves and the epistemological underpinnings of racial capitalism itself. Indeed, Africans held ideologies and conceptions about the nature and purpose of political structures, monarchal rule, and slavery and freedom before their forcible transport to the Americas. John K. Thornton's (1993b) work shows that loyalty to the King of Kongo was present among West Central Africans during the Haitian Revolution.[8] While some black leaders of the early and post-Haitian Revolution era embraced both republican and monarchal forms of government, the notion that either political ideology "trickled down" from the French Revolution cannot fully account for the masses of African and African descendants and their political worldviews. It therefore cannot be taken for granted that Saint-Domingue's half million African Diasporans immediately attached themselves to European political philosophies because they had none of their own. The present study argues, in part inspired by the work of Carolyn Fick, that the women and men who were forced to labor on sugar, coffee, indigo, and cotton plantations had a collective consciousness opposed to slavery and racial capitalism that shaped their forms of resistance, and urged Haitian Revolution leaders Georges Biassou, Jean-François Papillon, Toussaint Louverture, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines to continually push the envelope for general emancipation and Haitian independence. This book therefore grapples with common perceptions that the driving ideologies of the Haitian Revolution were indigenized versions of French republicanism or royalism.

The anti-monarchal revolutions in France and in North America drastically changed the social and political landscape of the Atlantic world, infusing in it ideas of liberty and independence. Yet neither country seriously engaged the question of how to extend freedom and rights to the enslaved Africans who propelled both nations' economic prosperity and ability to leverage power against their respective monarchal rulers. As early as 1896 in his doctoral dissertation *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, W. E. B. Du Bois claimed it was the Haitian Revolution that "intensified and defined the anti-slavery movement" and was one of several major factors that led to the eventual abolition of the transAtlantic slave trade in 1807.[9] The prohibition of the trade, and the abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue, did not directly result from either the American or French Revolutions, both of which were hindered from fully actualizing and universalizing republican political ideals by their unwavering commitment to slavery as the primary mode of economic

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