

“Egalité and Empire: Race War & the Louisiana Purchase, 1794-1803”

39th Annual Northern Great Plains History Conference

Bismarck, ND, October 28, 2004, (Updated, November 29, 2020)

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In 1794, the chief legislative body of the French Revolution, the “Convention,” abolished slavery and instituted full human rights for adult black males in the French Empire. It did not stop there. It also gave full citizenship to those same black males, an accomplishment that was not matched in the United States with any finality until 1964. In so doing the Convention announced that they were ending “aristocracy of the skin,” a term that begs for greater usage in the Anglophone world.¹ The driving force behind this egalitarian measure was the successful mobilization of former slaves on San Dominge [Haiti] by Toussaint L’Ouverture into a formidable military force, which forced Sontoux, the French Governor there, to grant freedom and citizenship rights to black men, and to suggest to Robespierre and the leaders of the Convention that they had better follow suit. The alternative was to lose Haiti, and Le Cap, the only deep water port between France and New Orleans to these former slaves -- or worse, to the British. Bowed by the French decision, the Haitians went on to defeat British attempts to take over the island in the 1790’s, and Napoleon’s troops as well, when he attempted to reestablish slavery in 1802, under the guise of restoring “law and order.” It was this military defeat, more than any other factor, which forced Napoleon’s hand in releasing Louisiana to the United States in 1803.²

One might fairly assume such an earth-shaking series of events in the struggle between the two greatest Empires of their day, the British and the French, might receive a greater telling in the history of the fledgling Republic which Thomas Jefferson sought to guide into the future amongst these giants. Such has not been the case. General ignorance concerning the pivotal role of the “only successful large-scale slave revolt known to history,”³ has been pervasive among the media and academia as well as in American history classes in primary and secondary education. One egregious example of ignorance in the media appeared in *The Chicago Tribune* on

¹ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd Edition revised, New York: Vintage, 1989, 139

² *Ibid*, entire; Appiah and Gates, *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and the African American Experience*, NY: Basic Books, 1999, 904-905, 185901860; and S.L. Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, NY: Oxford U. Press, 1965, 364-367

³ Robin Blackburn, “Of Human Bondage,” *The Nation*, October 4, 2004, 28

December 12, 1997. In advising the Clinton administration to “pack it up in Haiti,” the editorial concluded: “Haiti’s misery is hard to ignore, but impossible to remedy by remote control. During the last three years the U.S. has done far more than its share to help Haitians help themselves. We now can, and should, declare our \$2 billion mission accomplished and go home with a clear conscience that we did all we could.”⁴ As a citizen and an educator I felt obliged to reply. My following letter to the *Tribune* was published in full, with two notable exceptions:

In your editorial advice of Friday, December 12, 1997, ‘Time to Pack It Up in Haiti’ you characterize that country as a bomb ready to go off, in spite of United States military intervention and two Billion dollars of expenditure.

Given an annual murder rate in Chicago and other American cities that still greatly surpasses any major city in western Europe except Belfast, where there is a civil war going on, I have no idea what your idea of a civil time bomb is. But even if things really are as bad in Haiti as you say, the *Chicago Tribune* needs to be reminded that it was the government of the United States which caused these 20th Century problems in the first place.

Haiti is the birthplace of the first successful slave rebellion in the name of equality for all men, regardless of color. If you think *Amistad* was a big deal [and your coverage of the recent movie and opera apparently shows that you do], then try *Toussaint L’Ouverture* and the *Black Jacobins of C.L.R. James and Wendell Phillips*. When the dust of the Napoleonic Wars settled in 1815, the only two Republics remaining in the Western Hemisphere were Haiti and the United States. The problem for many of your readers [and Hollywood], of course, is that there are no white American heroes of consequence in this story to compare to John Quincy Adams. A few French officials and the poor people of Paris, but that is about it. The main players were heroic blacks and villainous whites.

The U.S. has the distinction in 1915 of destroying the sovereignty of the Republic of Haiti. On July 28 of that year, in defense of the Monroe Doctrine, and in rivalry with the German and British Empires, President Woodrow Wilson sent in the Marines, men recruited from a country that sanctioned Jim Crow and practiced Apartheid⁵ with the blessings of its Supreme Court. The gratuitous slaughter of Haitians and destruction of their way of life was little noticed in the bigger events of World War I, but the record is not one that your average “4th of July Historian” would care to emphasize.

So ‘pack it up’ if you will ladies and gentlemen, but do not imagine that the citizens of the United States can at this time quit Haiti with, as you put it, ‘a clear conscience that we did all we could.’

Or would you advocate that Americans claim ignorance of what their government did?

Perhaps not. This popular 20th Century dodge has become less respectable since the Holocaust, as you probably know.

Please allow me to suggest that a more appropriate stance than the phrase ‘packing it up’ would be for you to advocate that the United States ‘wash its hands’ of Haiti. Let the metaphor of Pontius Pilate’s Roman Empire stand for the *Chicago Tribune’s* American version. If your readers cannot have a sense of shame from your pages, we would, at least, appreciate some accuracy.⁶

Harsh words, perhaps, but Chicago is a tough town, and strong language is sometimes required to deliver a message. In their laudable desire for brevity the editors cut down my piece from 494

⁴ The full text of the offending editorial is attached in Appendix A

⁵ I used the term Apartheid here because of its pithy applicability to the separation of blacks from whites, knowing full well that it is a term that dates only from mid-20th Century south Africa, well after many of the events of racial separation that precede it. So also do we use the term “ethnic cleansing” to describe mass murder and mayhem in all periods of history, even though it is a recent euphemism, coined by Slobodan Milosovich to rationalize mass murder in the former Yugoslavia. The terms “socialism,” “liberalism,” and “conservatism,” also were coined within a decade after the major events which inspired such labels – The French Revolution.

⁶ To: “Voice of the People,” Wednesday, January 7, 1998

words to 448. Some editing arguably made the piece better,⁷ but in the process they excised two matters of substance, one of them a serious omission. They changed my “with the blessings of its Supreme Court” to “de facto Apartheid,” perhaps an improvement from a legalistic point of view as well as in a linguistic sense. I don’t wish to quibble about that one. But there is little excuse for their removing “A few French officials and the poor people of Paris,” from a factual, historical viewpoint -- only, perhaps, the lingering one of an anti-French bias, endemic to English-speaking peoples, excoriated by George Orwell in his essay on Charles Dickens of 1939:

All peoples who have reached the point of becoming nations tend to despise foreigners, but there is not much doubt that the English-speaking races are the worst offenders. One can see this from the fact that as soon as they become fully aware of any foreign race, they invent an insulting nickname for it. Wop, Dago, Froggy, Squarehead, Kike, Sheeny, Nigger, Wog, Chink, Greaser, Yellowbelly---these are merely a selection. Any time before 1870 the list would have been shorter, because the map of the world was different from what it is now, and there were only three or four foreign races that had fully entered into the English consciousness. But towards these, and especially towards France, the nearest and best-hated nation, the English attitude of patronage was so intolerable that English ‘arrogance’ and ‘xenophobia’ are still a legend.⁸

Mention of Dickens reminds me that many of us were given his *Tale of Two Cities* in High School English courses -- great literature to be sure, but also unremitting propaganda against any and all parts of the French Revolution that could easily be admired by any cold war or right wing, *America First*, pundit of our contemporary scene.

The thrust of my polemic against the Chicago *Tribune* was somewhat misplaced. Their editors’ ignorance of the Haitian contribution to the Louisiana Purchase was no greater than that of editors at other well-known newspapers in the United States. Moreover, in fairness to the offending *Tribune* editorial writer, his or her ignorance was fostered by scant attention paid to the Haitian revolution in American history textbooks and surveys, despite the existence of readily available information, like the reissue in the 1960’s and 1989 of C.L.R. James’s classic 1938 study, *The Black Jacobins*. Without singling out any of the many historians of the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition, my limited perusal of them shows little more than a passing reference to the military significance of the Haitian rebellion, and virtually no mention of its grounding in the French Revolutionary principles of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. Europeanists are only slightly better...Geoffrey Bruun had this to say in 1938:

⁷ Their text is reproduced in Appendix B

⁸ George Orwell, “Charles Dickens,” *Dickens, Dali and Others*, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1946, 46

It was Bonaparte's intention to make Haiti a stepping-stone to Louisiana...His leaping imagination pictured a French empire in America, the Antilles its gateway, New Orleans commanding the mouth of the Mississippi, French Guiana, enlarged by a section of Brazilian coast gained from Portugal in 1801, commanding the mouth of the Amazon. But this insubstantial pageant faded with the destruction of Leclerc's expedition to Haiti, where the obduracy of the blacks and the malignance of the yellow fever dimmed the French hopes of re-conquest by the close of 1802...The disaster at Haiti helped to settle the fate of Louisiana.⁹

Robert Darnton has been illuminating on the electrifying principles of the French Revolution and their creation of a "new sense of possibility--not just of writing constitutions or of legislating liberty and equality, but of living by the most difficult of revolutionary values, the brotherhood of man."¹⁰ However, even Darnton makes no specific reference to their impact on Haiti and the United States in the way of C.L.R. James. R.R. Palmer does -- in his two volume, *Age of Democratic Revolution*, and in his well known textbook on modern Europe.¹¹ But Palmer's references are, by necessity of his larger sweep, few. African-American historians like Bernard Nalty, have covered the Haitian Revolution's significance for New Orleans and the nervous American slave owners there,¹² but the larger, transatlantic issues are left out. In his 1944 work *Capitalism and Slavery*, and like C.L.R. James in 1938, put his finger on the significance of that successful slave rebellion.¹³ Williams provides a broad setting for the work of James and Dubois on Haiti, but no more. Other recent monographs dealing with Haiti tend to dwell on its 20th Century horrors and the delinquencies of American Foreign Policy rather than the historical context of the French Revolution.¹⁴ One of the few exceptions among historians, besides James, is the work of Laurent Dubois. As Robin Blackburn puts it:

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of books about the Haitian Revolution, but only a handful are indispensable. *Avengers of the New World* joins that select company...This book also provides an excellent account of the wider Caribbean and metropolitan context. Particularly valuable is its discussion of how French abolitionism and republicanism were tested in the New World--and how they yielded new conclusions when adopted by former slaves and the partisans of black liberation.¹⁵

⁹ Geoffrey Bruun, *Europe and the French Imperium, 1799-1814*, NY: Harper, 1938, 84-85

¹⁰ Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette; Reflections in Cultural History*, NY: Norton, 1990, 19

¹¹ R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution; A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1964, Vol. 2, *The Struggle*, 513-515; R.R. Palmer, Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 7th Edition, NY: McGraw Hill, 1992, 390

¹² Bernard Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*, NY: Free Press, 1986, 23-25

¹³ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, NY: Capricorn, 1966, 202

¹⁴ See, for example, Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, Introduction By Noam Chomsky, Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 432pp; and James Ridgeway, ed., *The Haiti Files: Decoding the Crisis*, Washington, D.C.: Essential Books, 243pp, 1994

¹⁵ Robin Blackburn review of Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 452pp, and Laurent DuBois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804*, Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina Press, 452, in *The Nation*, October 4, 2004, 28. Blackburn is also the author of *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*, London, 1989

In the Prologue Dubois acknowledges his debt to C.L.R. James,¹⁶ in placing the Haitian Revolution in the context of Europe and the Americas:

The revolution began as a challenge to French imperial authority by colonial whites, but it soon became a battle over racial inequality, and then over the existence of slavery itself. The slaves who revolted in 1791, organized themselves into a daunting military and political force, one ultimately embraced by the French Republican officials. Facing enemies inside and outside the colony, these Republicans allied themselves with the insurgent slaves in 1793. They offered freedom in return for military support, which quickly led to the abolition of slavery in the colony. The decision made in Saint-Dominge was ratified in Paris in 1794: the slaves of all the French colonies became citizens of the French Republic.¹⁷

Seen as the most radical phase of political change between the 1770's and 1830's, these events are the "most concrete expression of the idea that the rights proclaimed in France's 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were indeed universal:

They could not be quarantined in Europe or prevented from landing in the ports of the colonies, as many had argued they should be. The slave insurrection of Saint-Domingue led to the expansion of citizenship beyond racial barriers despite the massive political and economic investment in the slave system at the time. If we live in a world in which democracy is meant to exclude no one, it is in no small part because of the actions of those slaves in Saint-Dominge who insisted that human rights were theirs too.¹⁸

It is to James and Dubois, then, that we can turn for the proper template to address the omission of the Haitian Revolution from American, European and World History -- if we dare. As a college educator from 1967 to 2000, I discovered the "Haitian gap" in my courses that covered the French Revolution.¹⁹ My students at Northeastern Illinois included a great number of grade school and high school teachers of American history, many at the Masters' plus level. NEIU was founded as a teacher's college and the average age of its students is around 27, with large numbers of returning students. Many of them -- African-Americans, Iraqis, Iranis, Irish, south Asians, east Asians, Nigerians, central and south Americans -- were pleased to learn of the Haitian achievement in defeating the British and the French Imperial forces, but virtually none of them had heard of it. It is only recently that popular treatments like Charles Cerami's Jefferson's Great Gamble have introduced the Haitian factor to popular imagination, and this in the context of our national celebration of the Lewis and Clark journey:

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Laurent DuBois, *Avengers*, 3

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Western Civilization, 1500A.D.-Present; World in the 20th Century (Corporations vs. Classes and Nations); French Revolution, World Revolutions, 1763-Present

France had proceeded to dispatch troops and the vessels bearing them into the Caribbean had, indeed, been originally destined for New Orleans, and only the black uprising raging in Saint Dominge had prevented this plan from being carried out...Because slave rebellions had almost never gained permanent success, and no one realized what a truly great leader Toussaint had been, most observers realized what a truly great leader Toussaint had been, most observers continued to believe that France would finally control the island and that the threat to New Orleans would materialize... although yellow fever played a major role and Toussaint's life ended tragically, his rebellion can be said to have played a significant part in preserving America's future in the continent.²⁰

The trouble with Cerami's breezy and enjoyable account, aside from too much emphasis on the role of mosquitos, and not enough on the deployment of Toussaint's military and diplomatic talents, is that it is sparsely documented. However decisive they may have been in a complementary way, mosquitos and yellow fever had been around with the French for generations, and were not new factors on San Dominge. A successful slave rebellion, based on the French Revolutionary "Rights of Man," was the new factor. Documentation of that rebellion has also been around for quite a while. Although Jefferson, despite his noble words of July 4, 1776, is silent on the subject, there is this from Alexander Hamilton:

July 5, 1803 -- Purchase of Louisiana --

...the navigation of the Mississippi will be ours unmolested...Every man, however, possessed of the least candor and reflection will readily acknowledge that the acquisition has been solely owing to a fortuitous concurrence of unforeseen and unexpected circumstances, and not to any wise or vigorous measures on the part of the American government...

On the part of France the short interval of peace has been wasted in...fruitless efforts to subjugate St. Domingo; and those means which were originally destined to the colonization of Louisiana had been gradually exhausted by the unexpected difficulties of this ill-starred enterprise.

To the deadly climate of St. Domingo, and to the courage and obstinate resistance made by its black inhabitants are we indebted for the obstacles which delayed the colonization of Louisiana, till...a rupture between England and France gave a new turn to the projects of the latter, and destroyed at once all her schemes...

...The real truth is,...the United States, by the unforeseen operation of events, gained what the feebleness...of its miserable system of measures could never have acquired.--Let us then, with all due humility, acknowledge this as another of those...interpositions of an over-ruling Providence, which we more especially experienced during our Revolutionary War, and by which we have more than once been saved from the consequences of our errors and perverseness.

...Provided therefore we have not purchased it too dear, there is all the reason for exultation which the friends of the administration display, and which all Americans may be allowed to feel.²¹

And this from Napoleon:

²⁰ Charles A. Cerami, *Jefferson's Great Gamble*, Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2003, 68-70

²¹ New York Evening *Post*, July 5, 1803, quoted in Richard B. Morris, ed., *Alexander Hamilton and the Founding of the Nation*, NY: The Dial Press, 1957, 119-121

I have to reproach myself with the attempt made upon the colony during the consulship. The design of reducing it by force was a great error. I ought to have been satisfied with governing it through the medium of Toussaint. Peace with England was not sufficiently consolidated, and the territorial wealth I should have acquired by its reduction would have served but to enrich our enemies.²²

With an army of from 25,00 to 30,000 blacks, what might I not undertake against Jamaica, the Antilles, Canada, the United States themselves, or the Spanish colonies? With such important political interests, could the difference of a few millions more or less of revenue to France be placed in competition?²³

In 1861, when Wendell Phillips sought to convince the North to employ freedmen in its war with the South, he cited the military prowess of the Haitians in his oratory on Toussaint L'Ouverture, a man he characterized as having "Napoleon's courage, Cromwell's zeal, and Washington's nobility."²⁴ It was Phillips, almost alone of the abolitionists, who saw the struggle between North and South in broader terms of the "continuing struggle between democracy and aristocracy which went back to the French Revolution and beyond."²⁵

Richard Hofstadter reminds us that historians critical of Phillips in the 1940's had been the same ones to "ignore the vital subject of miscegenation and the light it throws upon the slave system and its caste psychology,"²⁶ in other words, James's "aristocracy of the skin." What is then to explain this strange silence for 200 years about these valiant black men, as Hamilton and Phillips put it? In an attempt at an explanation there are at least six categories that we can and should explore.

The Color Line: "Aristocracy of the skin" is a more effective phrase to describe the color line in Anglo-America, and its legacy for the 21st century as enunciated by John Hope Franklin:

Writing at the beginning of [the 20th] century,...W.E.B. Du Bois asserted that the problem of the twentieth century 'is the problem of the color line--the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.'...

I venture to state categorically that the problem of the 21st century will be the color line.²⁷

²² Las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena*, Philadelphia, PA, 1823, 4: 114-115, quoted in Philip C. Naylor, *Western Receptions/Perceptions*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997, 44

²³ Somerset de Chair, ed., *Napoleon on Napoleon: An Autobiography of the Emperor*, London: Cassell, 1992, 177-178, quoted in Naylor, *Receptions*, 43-44

²⁴ Irving Barlett, *Wendell Phillips: Brahmin Radical*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 246

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Richard Hofstadter, "Wendell Phillips: The Patrician as Agitator," *The American Political Tradition*, NY: Vintage, 1989, 178

²⁷ John Hope Franklin, *The Color Line: Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, Columbia, MO: U. of Missouri Press, 1993, 5

With the words of DuBois and Franklin in mind, any social studies pedagogy that would address this subject is advised to emphasize the important legacy of the Haitians and their impact on the Louisiana Purchase and the whole of American history since 1803.

2. The Anti-French Tradition in Anglo–America: From the time of the ethnic cleansing of Acadians in 1755²⁸ to the abortive recent attempt to take the word “French” out of “French fries,” in a jingoistic reaction to France’s refusal to support a second Iraq War by a second President Bush, there has been a long standing anti-French animus in Anglo-America. According to historian and musician Dennis Stroughmatt,²⁹ there are some 17 million Franco-Americans among the cajuns, métis and others who moved down from Canada and up from New Orleans, no small number. Examination of the anti-French animus in American history should yield fresh insights into how our “national” assumptions may well be based on the rather parochial guidelines of an English culture, not an auspicious underpinning for a would be “democratic” world power of any permanency.

3. Military Factors: Military factors in the Haitian story have been dealt with more extensively by a few American Historians who have paid attention, but much more needs to be done to put the Haitian defeats of the two greatest military powers of their day into a proper perspective-- from the aspects of strategy and grand strategy, as well as tactics. It is known, for example, that Lord Nelson loathed his experience in the Caribbean, and the tactics that privateers used against him there, and had even contemplated resigning from the Royal Navy in frustration with such ungentlemanly means of warfare.³⁰ The possibilities of a well-disciplined black army, deployed in the British Caribbean, aided and abetted by a French fleet that had survived Aboukir Bay and was 3 years away from Trafalgar, are fascinating to contemplate.

4. Ideology: What Americans call civil liberties and others call human rights, the French called *liberté* and release from the “aristocracy of the church.” What Americans call civil rights, the

²⁸ Craig Brown, ed., *The Illustrated History of Canada*, Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2000, 81-182

²⁹ Dennis Stroughmatt, a Masters in History from the University of Southern Illinois-Carbondale, but better known as one of this country’s foremost interpreters of Cajun music, zydeco, etc. His CD’s include “Entre Le Passé et L’Avenir: La Musique de la Nouvelle France,” and “Dennis Stroughmatt & Creole Stomp: Enfin...At Last!!” His website is www.creolestomp.com.

³⁰ I am indebted for this insight to Peter Browne, Anglo-Canadian, Oxford trained, and my Professor for the British History Minor at the U. of Wisconsin-Madison in 1963-1964.

French called *égalité*, release from “aristocracy of the skin” and the *Declaration of Rights of Woman and Female Citizen*. This declaration, like the *Declaration of Rights of Man*, has 17 theses. The first reads: “Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.”³¹ What Americans call community, or the pursuit of Happiness, the French called *fraternité* and release from the “aristocracy of blood.” As Napoleon put it: ...my maxim was [career open to talent] without distinction of birth or fortune, and this system of equality is the reason that your (British) oligarchy hates me so much...³² Napoleon was on to something here. A proper attention to the themes of the French Revolution that are still very much with us, would stand us in good stead in the classroom, the media, and in public discussion. Where did Meriwether Lewis, for example, get the most unmilitary idea that William Clark should be his equal, in rank as well as in fact, if not from the ideas emanating from the actualities of the French Revolution -- following hard upon the fine words of his patron Thomas Jefferson in his 1776 Declaration?

5. Spirituality: There are also spiritual factors to be considered as well -- in the war of whites against blacks, men against women, perpetrators against victims, and oligarchy against democracy. Laurent Dubois introduces these powerful psychological and religious factors in his other major work, *A Colony of Citizens*, which deals with the same issues of the French Revolution facing former slaves in the French Empire on Guadeloupe, as those on Haiti. Their less successful rebellion by no means ended their spiritual resistance:

Vodou crosses boundaries, travels from the countryside of Haiti to the streets of Brooklyn and Paris, and carries with it the marks of the history it helped forge...in a sense Vodou is a republic, a religion created from enslavement and revolution against it, a religion that unites different nations of African and New World deities within shifting but solid r'egllements [laws].³³

Just as Negro Spirituals have sustained the souls of black folks where slave rebellions were unsuccessful, to say nothing of how they have captured and enriched the souls of white folks, so has Vodou enriched the souls of the undaunted Haitians. Historians of the Americas need to pay as much attention to the latter Caribbean phenomena as to the fanciful South of Stephen Foster and Joel Chandler Harris.

³¹ Olympe de Gouge, late 1791

³² March 3, 1817, from R.M. Johnston, *The Corsican*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910, 496, quoted in Mosse, *et.al.* eds., *Europe in Review*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1957, 189

³³ Laurent DuBois, *Colony of Citizens*, 436-437

6. Academic Compartmentalization: The only successful slave rebellion in history and its impact on the Louisiana Purchase simply hasn't fit into any category of American, European or other History. Here again we might turn to C.L.R. James and his suggestion that we substitute "Transnational Americas Studies" for "American Studies" in our minds and in our academic disciplines. Donald Pease elaborates in his introduction to James's *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*:

As James imagined it [while interned by the McCarran Act as a subversive] on Ellis Island, Transnational Americas Studies presupposed a global analytic model that would no longer move from the U.S. center. It would entail hemispheric coverage by way of an analytic approach informed by several disciplines that would offer multicultural perspectives on the peoples and cultures of the Americas. James distinguishes transnational from national and international formations by their relatively greater unmooring from national contexts.³⁴

Conclusion: The Haitian Revolution was and is important. While the penchant of historians to categorize may be partly to blame for its lack of inclusion in the major events of 1789-1803, willful denial of the color line in American History is also a major contributor. For reasons that are just now coming to the fore in popular culture and literature, as well as scholarly work, it has just been too difficult until very recently for whites to take blacks seriously in this country. White historians bear a substantial part of the responsibility for that shameful legacy. Many whites in the 1960's went from ignoring blacks completely, directly to fear and loathing, exemplified in Chicago in 1969 by the lesser known murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. Reaction to that localized "search and destroy mission," marked the beginning of a black empowerment movement in Chicago, aided and abetted by some whites, this writer included. This led to the election of Harold Washington as Mayor of Chicago in February and April of 1983, and the movement that brought Barack Obama to the national stage in 2004 as a prohibitive favorite for the U.S. Senate. Harold Washington's election depended upon white myopia to a great extent. It never dawned on the two Irish candidates in the all-important Democratic Primary, Richie Daley and Jane Byrne, that they

³⁴ Hanover, NH: U. Press of New England, 2001, xxx

might split the vote, and allow the registered black voters of Chicago, about 40% as of November 1982, to put their man in. That is exactly what happened. For once, white ignorance of and disrespect for black empowerment was an advantage. That has usually not been the case, and is, sadly, still the case for the unfortunate Haitians who continue to face their fate with unheralded, but **undaunted** courage that deserves equal billing with that of Lewis and Clark, a sobering antidote to celebratory annals of the history of the Americas.³⁵

APPENDIX - A

Though nearly all other United Nations peacekeeping troops in Haiti have left, President Clinton has ordered several hundred American troops to stay behind, as part of a mission that is unclear and open-ended. Those two factors alone would make any U.S. peacekeeping venture and unacceptable risk.

But in Haiti we have a third factor: A country that remains a bomb with a lit fuse, one that a U.S. military invasion, massive U.S. and international occupation and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid have not been able to extinguish.

It would be foolhardy for our troops to be there if the bomb goes off. Congress should not renew the authorization--which expires Dec. 31--to maintain a U.S. contingent in Haiti.

The official U.S. rationale is Clinton double-talk at its most exasperating. 'Have I made an indefinite commitment? No,' the president explained. 'But I have made a definite commitment to continue to be involved...in ways that I think are appropriate.'

So the 300 to 500 U.S. troops remaining in Haiti will be treading warily in a dangerous twilight zone between a definite and an indefinite commitment.

U.S. involvement began three years ago with the deployment of a massive military force of 20,000 that was gradually replaced by UN peacekeepers. Since then, the Haitians' dismal fortunes have barely improved. Both the government and the economy are nearly prostrate, and there are no credible leaders or solutions in sight.

The mission of the remaining American troops is dangerously ambiguous. U.S. soldiers are supposed to help with infrastructure projects such as building roads and digging wells. But in reality, by holding a pickaxe with one hand and an M-16 with the other, and being able to drive both a bulldozer and a Humvee, the U.S. troops are meant function as a deterrent to renewed violence and blood shed.

When such a vague mission will end is impossible to predict. So far the U.S. has suffered few casualties in Haiti, but that could change at any point as the situation in the country continues to unravel.

Haiti's misery is hard to ignore, but impossible to remedy by remote control. During the last three years the U.S. has done far more than its share to help Haitians help themselves. We now can, and should, declare our \$2 billion mission accomplished and go home with a clear conscience that we did all we could."

³⁵ See for example, Steven Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*, NY: Touchstone, 1996

APPENDIX - B

“Your Dec. 12 editorial “Time to Pack It Up in Haiti” characterizes that country as a bomb ready to go off, in spite of United States military intervention and \$2billion in expenditures.

Given an annual murder rate in Chicago and other American cities that still greatly surpasses any major city in western Europe except Belfast (where there is a civil war going on), I don’t know what you consider a civil time bomb. Even if things really are as bad in Haiti as you say, the Tribune needs to be reminded that it was the U.S. government that caused the problems there during this century.

Haiti is the birthplace of the first successful slave rebellion in the name of equality for all men, regardless of color. If you think Amistad was a big deal---and your coverage of the recent movie and opera suggests that you do---then read about Toussaint L/Ouverture and read ‘The Black Jacobins’ of C.L.R. James.

When the dust of the Napoleonic Wars settled in 1815, the only two republics remaining in the Western Hemisphere were Haiti and the United States. The problem for many of your readers--and Hollywood--of course is that this story doesn’t have any white American heroes of consequence like John Quincy Adams. The players were black heroes and white villains.

In 1915 the U.S. had the distinction of destroying the sovereignty of the Republic of Haiti. On July 28 of that year, in defense of the Monroe Doctrine and fueled by our rivalry with the German and British Empires, President Woodrow Wilson sent in the U.S. Marines--men recruited from a country that sanctioned Jim Crow and practiced de facto apartheid.

The gratuitous slaughter of Haitians and destruction of their way of life was little noticed in the bigger events of World War I, but the record is not one that your average 4th of July historian would care to emphasize.

So ‘pack it up’ if you will, ladies and gentlemen, but do not imagine that citizens of the United States can at this time quit Haiti with, as you put it, ‘a clear conscience that we did all we could.’

Or would you advocate that Americans claim ignorance of what their government did? Perhaps not. This popular 20th Century dodge has become less respectable since the Holocaust, as you probably know.

A more appropriate stance that ‘packing it up’ would be for the United States to ‘wash its hands’ of Haiti. Let that metaphor of Pontius Pilate’s Roman Empire stand for the Tribune’s American version. If your readers cannot have a sense of shame from your defense, they would, at least, appreciate some accuracy.”